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# **FANTASTIC**

**JANUARY 1983**

**Founded in 1926  
by Hugo Gernsback**

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# opinion

Robert Silverberg

One of the most interesting science-fiction anthologies of the season is a book called *The Eureka Years*, edited by Annette Peltz McComas and published by Bantam Books. What I find so interesting about it is not its stories as much as its interstitial commentary; for the stories, fine jobs though they are, by such folks as Sturgeon, Asimov, Bester, Anderson, and Bradbury, are all familiar to me from long ago. The real substance of the book—for me, and for anyone interested in the behind-the-scenes story of science-fiction publishing—is the commentary that Annette McComas has generously sprinkled through. *The Eureka Years* is in fact a memorial to the first five years (1949-54) of the *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, which was founded by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas; and what Mrs. McComas has given us here is a host of letters, memos, rejection slips, rewrite orders, and other backstage memorabilia that show us most vividly how two great editors set about the creation and sustenance of a great science-fiction magazine.

The rewrite orders are the most significant part, I think; and they

engender some heavy brooding on my part. For example, in the summer of 1949 a young California writer sent Boucher and McComas a short story for their projected new publication. McComas rejected it, with a note praising the writing but going on to say, "We feel that it isn't distinctive enough, doesn't have enough power to meet the terrifically high standard we will want to set. . . ." Whereupon the writer, a week later, obligingly sent a second story, which came closer to what Boucher and McComas wanted. But there were problems. The writer had used Ambrose Bierce, the hardbitten old Fantasist, as a character; McComas wrote, "Bierce is completely incredible. Can you imagine 'Bitter' Bierce saying, 'What will happen to us? God save us?' Rather, he would chortle gleefully over the dilemma and enjoy with complete detachment the futilities of both the invaders and the exiles." Nathaniel Hawthorne was also a character in this story; and the writer, McComas felt, had been "amazingly inaccurate" about him, quoting from Benet's *Reader's Encyclopedia* to show where the problems lay. And there were other minor difficulties.

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To which the writer replied, "You're right about Bierce and Hawthorne. Put it down to the fact that I've never been a research man in my life, preferring to manufacture my fantasies out of whole cloth. . . . Although you mention my bad characterization of Bierce, Hawthorne, et cetera, you never mentioned whether the story as a whole titillated you. If you would like the story rewritten to patch up the holes, you know darn well I would enjoy correcting my own errors." McComas answered that he was pretty certain a rewrite would be acceptable; and a few weeks later, co-editor Boucher entered the proposing that when the rewrite was done another character — Henry David Thoreau — be dropped, and Charles Dickens and L. Frank Baum be substituted in his place. Boucher also had some subtle ideas about the handling of H.P. Lovecraft in the same story.

The rewrite was done; the story was accepted; and on November 27, 1949, the writer told Boucher and McComas, "Bless you both, and keep you! I really feel very fortunate in having such good and generous friends and editors."

The story was "The Exiles." The writer was Ray Bradbury. The amount he was paid for his work was, I think, \$100. Although \$100 went a lot further in 1949 than it does today, it was still a relatively trifling amount for a short story — especially one by Bradbury, who even then was commanding \$700 and more per story from such magazines as *The Saturday Evening*

*Post* and *The New Yorker*.

Imagine the audacity of the editors! They solicit a story from Bradbury, telling him they can't possibly afford his regular wage; he sends it and they reject it (a section of *The Martian Chronicles*, no less); he obligingly sends another, and they make him reconceive two characters and replace another, before they'll give him his hundred bucks. Was it worth it? Can editors really afford to be so picky over a single short story? Should Bradbury not have snatched up his manuscript with a sneer and shipped it over to the *Post*?


Well, perhaps so. Yet the story, in its revised form, has been reprinted dozens of times; and few would deny its status as a classic of fantasy. And editors Boucher and McComas, both now alas gone from this world, are enshrined for ever in the hearts of writers who, like Bradbury, were politely and patiently shown how their fine work could be made splendid.

In the same anthology we see Alfred Bester being told, "We think you've missed your real point" and asked to revise, though McComas could not give him a promise of a sale even if he did. (Bester revised and got his sale: "Of Time and Third Avenue.") We see Manly Made Wellman being asked if the silver guitar strings of John the ballad-singer were really plausible. (Wellman quoted chapter and verse to show that they were.) We see Isaac Asimov asked for "a more subtly phrased ending" to his story "Flies," and promptly supplying

it, and then thinking the story was still not good enough after it was accepted and offering to buy it back. (The offer was turned down and the story published.) And a memo by Boucher in 1952 notes that some 50% of all stories received were returned for rewrites. It's fascinating stuff, at least to one who has been an editor and writer himself over the past quarter of a century and some.

I wonder if such finicky editing still goes on. [Yes. — GHS] I will tell you quite shamelessly that I regard a rewrite request on a short story as a pain in the neck; I would much rather send a piece out on Monday and get my check on Friday, without the intervention of someone else's ideas, bright or otherwise. But when the editor has a point to make, I listen; and if the editor is someone who might know what he's talking about, I do indeed condescend to take a second look at my deathless prose. Damon Knight, when he was editing *Orbit*, had me do *five* revisions, some mighty trivial, on a short story; it was "Passengers," which won a Nebula. Alice Turner of *Playboy* had me turn a story completely inside out, which I was going to refuse to do until she astounded me

by showing me how easy it would be. ("Gianni.") Robert Sheckley, when he was at *Omni*, made a strong story a lot stronger with some shrewd quibbles. ("The Far Side of the Bell-Shaped Curve.") I suppose other writers, even unto Le Guin and Herbert and Clarke, get told occasionally how to make fine work finer. But is there anyone around — Scithers? Schmidt? Ferman? Datlow? McCarthy? Who? — who consistently gets down into the innards of nearly every story to peer at the carburetor and the fan-belt, the way McComas and Boucher did a generation ago? And do the writers usually put up with it? [Sometimes — GHS]

It's not the editor's role to impose his own personality or style on a story. The great editor simply finds the story that the writer intended to tell, and helps him bring it into higher resolution. Some editors are pests; some are geniuses. I knew all along that Boucher and McComas were geniuses — but the spectacle of such folk as Bradbury and Bester and Asimov meekly tearing stories apart for the sake of \$100 sales, as demonstrated in Annette McComas's fine new book, shows me just what geniuses they really were. 

**Publisher: Jake Jaquet**  
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*Since Tom Staicar has left us, we have obtained the services of two regular reviewers, Frank Catalano (1222 Taylor Avenue North #402, Seattle WA 98109) and Robert S. Coulson (Route 3, Hartford City, IN 47348). Finished books — and especially galleys — should be directed to either (or both) of these two reviewers. In addition, we occasionally take in a guest reviewer — Alan Dean Foster, this time around, who admits he's fascinated by some ducks. . . .*

by Frank Catalano

Hi, I'm your new reviewer . . . (no, that doesn't sound quite right). Greetings, Gentle Reader . . . (no, that's been used).

What the Hell. The direct approach.

Allow me to welcome you to a new feature of the new *Amazing*: a dual book review column. Both Robert S. (Buck) Coulson and I will be handling the reviewing chores in future months, and Buck will fill you in on his reviewing criteria elsewhere in these pages.

Mine are quite simple: I believe a book should be entertaining, well-written, and well-plotted with believable characters and settings. If some sort of message can be interwoven with all of that — without it being so intrusive that the reader gets beaten over the head with it — so much the better.

By way of background, my own experience in the field has been as a science-fiction and fantasy writer, albeit a new one. In addition to that, I've done various columns and articles for a number of publications — including review work for radio stations, magazines, newspapers, and United Press International. All of which, I hope, will allow me to do the best job for you when it comes to looking over new

books.

Enough introduction, and on to what you've started reading this column for.

**The Shadow of the Torturer**

by Gene Wolfe

Timescape: \$2.75 (paper)

**The Claw of the Conciliator**

by Gene Wolfe

Timescape: \$12.95 (cloth),

\$2.75 (paper)

**The Sword of the Lictor**

by Gene Wolfe

Timescape: \$15.50 (cloth),

\$2.95 (paper)

**The Citadel of the Autarch**

by Gene Wolfe

Timescape: \$15.95 (cloth)

Probably the worst thing I can say about Gene Wolfe's four volumes that make up *THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN* is although like most serials, each of the books ends with something of a cliffhanger, again like most serials, Wolfe's books' titles all sound as though they were taken right out of a bad string of Flash Gordon films.

That's where any griping ends. It's hard to add anything new in praise to a series that has garnered most of the major science fiction and fantasy awards,



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but *THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN* is the best blend of philosophy and entertainment I've read in a long time.

In case you haven't picked up any of the volumes yet, the series is the first-person memoirs of Severian of the Guild of Torturers. The Earth (or Urth in this case) that he writes about is one in the far distant future: the Moon has been irrigated, man has already been to the stars and back, and the Sun is dying. The slow death of the Sun provides only part of the meaning of the series title, but to say more would be to give too much away. Actually, to say too much more about the plot itself — except that it follows Severian's rise to authority in about a year's time — would be to cheat you of a very enjoyable reading experience.

The plot is quite complex, but gets tied up nicely in the last book. I think Wolfe may have decided to try and tie things up too nicely in one instance by hinting at Severian's lineage in the last few pages. I also had a hard time catching exactly what the reason was for the events at the end of *The Shadow of the Torturer*. But Wolfe writes richly, and it's very possible I missed that explanation in the dazzling verbal pyrotechnics. Those pyrotechnics had me running to my dictionary a number of times. Instead of making up a lot of words for his far distant future, Wolfe pulls out a lot of terms that are no longer in general usage today to explain measurement, class structure, architecture, and military activities. No series ever more enjoyably increased my vocabulary than this one.

While some writers bludgeon the reader with detail, Wolfe packages that — and some philosophy — neatly into Severian's narrative without killing the pacing of the novels. To quote Severian himself in the first book, "... The contending parties of tradition pull

at the writers of histories. . . . One desires ease, the other, richness of experience in the execution . . . of the writing. And I must try . . . to satisfy each. This I have attempted to do."

And, from all indications, succeeded.

### **Helliconia Spring**

by Brian W. Aldiss

Atheneum: \$15.95 (cloth)

Where Wolfe succeeds in interweaving a rich background easily into the narrative is where Aldiss fails in *Helliconia Spring*. Aldiss has created a fascinating world. Helliconia is a planet in a binary-sun system, in which one sun has a long, elliptical orbit around the other. Helliconia revolves around the orbiting sun, and takes 2,500 Earth years to make one trip around the central star. When Helliconia and its nearby sun approach the other body in their travels, hundreds of years of winter on the planet give way to spring; thus, the book's title and premise.

Like Wolfe's books, it's a dictionary-eater, admittedly to a slighter degree. Unlike Wolfe's books, the details of the world slow the reading to a crawl. Aldiss throws so much at you that the narrative stops dead in places as you're repeatedly filled in on some of the world's background. That's irritating, and will deter the less-determined reader.

The story is that of Laintal Ay, and of how Laintal Ay's people deal with the change of seasons, a change last seen by their long-dead ancestors. Though the plot is one of reaction to meteorological events, the characterizations Aldiss brings into play are excellent. All of the characters are noticeably human, in that they are flawed. But they're flawed differently, with different strengths, giving us a good look at their motivations.

The book is slow going, and it's

understandable why, having given so much detail Aldiss plans three volumes in the saga. If you like a well-crafted world with an unusual environment, I can recommend it, but it's not an easy read.

### **Earthchild**

by Sharon Webb

Atheneum: \$11.95 (cloth)

This is one of those books that starts out so incredibly well, then falls apart in the last few chapters. *Earthchild* is based on the novelet "Earthchild Rising" from *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* in 1981. Where that work is incorporated into the opening of the novel, it shines; but when it gets far past the novelet's ending, it leaves me wanting to tear my hair out, sputtering, "But . . . but . . . it had such promise!"

And the idea does. The Mouat-Gari process has been covertly released into the world's food and water supplies, a process that renders children (through their early teens) immortal. This immortality is not easy for the oh-so-mortal adults to take; some of them take to doing away with as many of the new immortals as possible.

In telling the story of how the world — and the youngsters — adjusts, Webb builds up two very strong characters: Kurt Kraus, a 14-year-old, and Silvio Tarantino, a newborn at the time the process's introduction is made public. The book is separated into three sections, the first taking place in the first year of the process, the second at the fifth year, and the third at the ninety-ninth. Throughout these years, we see how Kraus, who becomes a leader, and Tarantino, who essentially is the villain of the piece, develop as the last of the mortals die off. Everything is poised for a great conflict.

Finally, there's a small skirmish

between the two. And the book ends. I kept turning the pages, expecting more. There wasn't. Resulting, therefore, is the sentiment I expressed at the beginning of this review.

Worse still, Webb introduces an intriguing plot device late in the book, one that states creativity is dying out as the immortals take over. But no explanation as to how this is happening is given, just a statistical correlation. All of these later chapters end with Significant Statements, but they don't have much of an impact because you're not motivated to feel they should. I fear Webb ends her novel with a great premise for beginning one.

This book cries out for a sequel, or another 100 pages. I can only hope that since this is Webb's first novel, her second will satisfy the expectations I had at the beginning of this one.

### **The Blind Men and the Elephant**

by Russell M. Griffin

Timescape: \$2.95 (paper)

If Michael Moorcock knew a thing about science, this is a book he'd have written. *The Blind Men and the Elephant* is a bizarre, fascinating, and thoroughly involving book that can just barely be categorized as science fiction. Indeed, if it were labelled as a mainstream novel, it probably would sell a lot better.

Griffin has taken a small-town television station (Channel 29 in Butler, Massachusetts), its weatherman (Durwood Leffingwell), and mixed them with a mistake of man and nature that comes into their lives (the Elephant Man). The resulting cocktail is a darkly irreverent and intoxicating look at small town TV, medical research, the government, and success. The view of the television station is so deadly accurate that I wouldn't be surprised if Griffin had worked for one at one time

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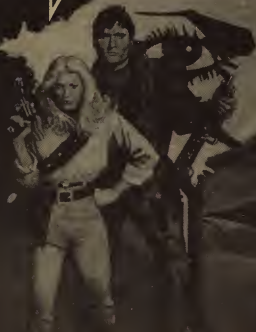
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# TEST OF FIRE



**BEN BOVA**

or another; he takes apart news anchors, weathermen, kids' shows, locals who do their own commercials, and just about everything else about local TV that can be put onto the printed page.

In case you're wondering, the Elephant Man in this book is similar — at least in appearance — to the real one recently popularized in a film and a stage play. Macduff, as he's called here, has hideous growths all over his body, travels covered up, and is thought to be stupid because he can't be easily understood. There the similarity with the real Elephant Man ends. Griffin's man-monster is not really a product of nature, but of scientific research, thus the element that gives the book its science-fiction label.

The novel's style carries it along more than the plot does, so that it's hard to do it justice in summary. But, in general terms, the Elephant Man falls into Leffingwell's hands when his/its promoter skips town after being frightened away by government agents. Leffingwell, with some prompting, decides he can use the Elephant Man as the key to success, while at the same time, Man/Macduff is trying to remember who he is and how he came to be what he is.

It's strange, it's entertaining, and it's just barely science fiction. It's also recommended.

### **The One Tree**

by Stephen R. Donaldson  
Del Rey: \$14.50 (cloth)

I'd like to think I'm not the only person getting fed up with Donaldson's *CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT THE UNBELIEVER*, but the bestseller lists appear to put my feelings in a minority. People are actually spending good money for this book. You'd think word of mouth

alone would deter them.

*The One Tree* is the second book in the second *CHRONICLES*. In the first *CHRONICLES*, all three books' worth, writer Thomas Covenant is having a hard time dealing with the fact he's a leper. He hurts himself . . . and finds himself miraculously transported to a place called the Land, where his white-gold wedding band controls the wild magic. He then spends three books saving the Land from Lord Foul, not really believing he's doing more than hallucinating all the while.

This time around, he's recalled to the Land after four thousand years have passed there, though only ten have gone by on our world. Once again, the Land is in dire need of his help; and he's brought along a friend, the insecure Dr. Linden Avery.

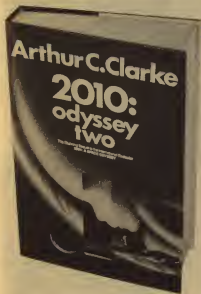
*The One Tree* follows Covenant as he and Linden look for, not surprisingly, the One Tree to make a new Staff of Law from to cure the Land of what ails it. But Donaldson has worn Covenant down into a one-dimensional character whose only emotion is anguish over his plight and what he and his magic are doing to others. That, the wordy descriptions, the similarly one-dimensional effect of Avery's insecurity, and the fact that the novel really doesn't go anywhere don't help the reader.

It's going to take an incredibly good third volume to get these second *CHRONICLES* to match the intensity of the first three books.

### **Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan**

by Vonda N. McIntyre  
Pocket Books: \$2.50 (paper)

Finally, just in case you get the impression that I don't care for best-selling SF or fantasy, let me briefly recommend *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan*. McIntyre, an excellent writer in her own right, has taken a slightly



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Cover by Michael Whelan

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better-than-adequate movie and fleshed it out nicely. As with any good novelization, you get more of the motivations behind the actions, and character development that doesn't get drowned out by the special effects.

Best of all, there's no ambiguous "Spock dies" ending at the closer of this version.

by Robert Coulson

---

There is no such thing as an unbiased review. Reviewers are human, and humans have prejudices. One can make a valiant attempt to overcome prejudice, but it usually creeps back in about the time one thinks that it's been eradicated. I prefer to lay out my biases in advance, so you'll know what to expect, and then try to differentiate between well-written stories and stories that I like. (Which are not necessarily the same thing; any reviewer who claims that what he likes is good and what he dislikes is bad is trying to fool either himself or the reader.) I tend to be cynical about fiction based on philosophy and alleged psychological insights, mainly because I've found very few of either that apply to me. I prefer interesting and likable characters, and I prefer to not read too much about any one of them; I can get to dislike almost anybody after the third book about him. I dislike long, involved books, largely because I don't have all that much time to read; and I positively loathe the trend to extremely long novels broken up into three or four books (Tolkien has a lot to answer for, there), though I hate it less if the publisher doesn't miscall it a "trilogy." And I'm a sucker for good historical back-

grounds. Remember all this in future columns (make a Xerox® copy of this statement and paste it up on your wall), and you'll have a better idea of how my reviews relate to your own prejudices.

One caveat: I've been reviewing for fanzines for twenty years, and with a smaller and more personally involved audience I've come to a sort of short-hand in my reviews. This won't work in *Amazing*, and I'll try to be more detailed and specific; but if I become unintelligible, write in and complain, and I'll try to improve. (You can write in and complain about my prejudices if you want to, but don't expect it to do any good.)

### Courtship Rite

by Donald Kingsbury

Timescape: \$17.50 (cloth), \$8.95 (trade paper)

Timescape picked a good novel for its first trade paperback. Kingsbury has given us a sociological story of an Earth colony somehow dumped on an alien and generally poisonous planet with barely sufficient resources for survival. The humans are on their way back up from barbarism and along the way have opted for multiple marriage, ritual and practical cannibalism, clans with specific functions, and other odd practices designed for survival in this specific environment. The author has done an expert job of showing all the intriguing background information without interrupting the story. I don't really believe that his primitive society could make all the scientific advances claimed for it, but Kingsbury very carefully doesn't describe how it's done, so there's nothing to argue with; either you accept it or you don't. I don't, but I thoroughly enjoyed the story anyway. Of course, I favor most of the philosophy embedded in it, which helps. ("Those who are not willing to kill



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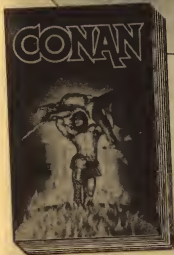


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make tempting victims and thus have chosen endless conflict, while those who *are* willing and able to kill may always *choose* a peaceful life." Not entirely accurate, but enough so to be refreshing.) The maran-Kaiel's courtship of candidates for the post of third-wife and simultaneous intriguing for the position of Prime Predictor provide a good plot on which to hang the real meat of the story, which is the fascinating social organization of Geta. Highly recommended.

### **The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger**

by Stephen King

Donald M. Grant, Publisher:

\$20.00 (cloth)

A strange novel, originally published as five stories in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* from 1978 through 1981. Almost totally concerned with symbolism rather than reality, it relates the pursuit of the man in black by the last gunslinger. There are flashbacks to the strange, pseudo-medieval system which spawned the gunslinger, and philosophical discourses which I mostly disagree with. The surreal background reminded me of a cross between King's *The Stand* and the 1954 movie *Red Garters*; I wonder if King ever saw the movie? A very odd item, and the first book in a series about The Tower which King admits will probably never be completed. The book itself is typical of Grant's beautiful productions, and is enhanced by five full-color paintings — one of them a double-page spread — by Michael Whelan. The story is very nearly unique, and liking King's other work is no guarantee that you'll like this, but I found it fascinating.

### **A History of the Hugo, Nebula, and International Fantasy Awards**

by Donald Franson and Howard

Devore

Misfit Press (4705 Weddel St.,  
Dearborn, MI 48125): \$5.00  
(paper)

This work is regularly updated; this edition covers the awards from the beginning through 1981. A short account of the background of each set of awards is given, and nominees and winners are listed for each year. An index covers all individuals, movie titles, and book publishers listed. It's an easy-to-use reference volume, both for researchers and for new readers interested in knowing which reprint items were highly regarded in their day.

### **The New Visions**

Doubleday: \$14.95 (cloth)

There's an introduction by Frederik Pohl, but you have to look hard to discover that the editors are Mary Sherwin, Ellen Asher, and Joe Miller. There is a blurb about the vast care with which the paintings in the book were chosen to represent modern science-fiction art; actually they are excellent reproductions of the dust-jacket paintings of Doubleday's SF Book Club editions. There is certainly a variety of artists and styles represented; a few are excellent, most are good enough, one or two are awful. Some of the big names of SF art are included — Vallejo, Frazetta, Whelan, Corben — along with a lot of the lesser names and a few old-timers like Ed Valigursky, who never received the credit he deserved for his solid-looking spaceships and space constructions. Not the best book of science-fiction art that I've seen, but acceptable enough. It includes 44 paintings, by 23 different artists. Reproduction quality — very important in an art book — is good, and each artist has provided a self-portrait and a short biographical sketch. Nobody in his right mind would buy an art book

from a written review, but take a look at this one next time you're in a bookstore or SF convention, or bug your library to get a copy.

### **The Best from Fantasy & Science Fiction: 24th Series**

edited by Edward L. Ferman  
Scribner's: \$14.95 (cloth)

Basically a large, hardcover edition of the magazine. You should be subscribing to *FF&SF* anyway; but if you're not, this provides a good sample of its contents. Copyrights run from 1979 thru 1982; those who do subscribe have doubtless read everything included. Stories include "Window" by Bob Leman (what if the people of the alternate world are smarter and more vicious than we are?), "The Fire When It Comes" by Parke Godwin (a different sort of ghost, who tends to think in psychological clichés), "Wives" by Lisa Tuttle (the problems of adaptation to the ultimate male chauvinists), "The Alien Mind" by Philip K. Dick (a vignette intended to be ironic and not quite making it), "Spidersong" by Susan C. Petrey (the day is saved by a musical arachnid), "Out There Where The Big Ships Go" by Richard Cowper (Zen applied to games theory?), "The Curse of the Mhondoro Nkabele" by Eric Norden (the science fiction writer with a Power; these things tend to seem funnier to editors than they do to me), "The Autopsy" by Michael Shea (the Final Solution to an alien parasite), "A Day At The Fair" by Neal Barrett, Jr. (rural amusements on an alien planet), "The Pusher" by John Varley (a spaceman with a very strange interest in little girls) and "The Brave Little Toaster" by Thomas M. Disch (a pseudo-juvenile parodying the work ethic). In addition there are samples of the regular columns; book reviews by Algis Budrys, science by Isaac Asimov,

movie/TV reviews by Baird Searles. Plus a verse by Russell Griffin and several of the humorous contests the magazine has been running lately. Not one of the best volumes of the series, but there are good items included and I moderately recommend it.

### **The Hand of Zei**

by L. Sprague de Camp  
Owlswick Press: \$20.50 (cloth)

### **The Prisoner of Zhamanak**

by L. Sprague de Camp  
Phantasia Press: \$15.00 (cloth)

De Camp is not an author who takes all of this nonsense seriously. This is especially notable in his series of stories about the barbaric planet Krishna, in which his characters tend to exhibit more of the little flaws and idiosyncracies of human nature than is the norm for an adventure novel. As I'm at least as cynical as de Camp, I've thoroughly enjoyed all of these books. Now, from two of the field's smaller publishers, comes a reprint of the first (and probably best) novel of the series, and its most recent volume. *Zei* was originally serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1950, and one of the nice things about this reprint is that it includes the original Ed Cartier illustrations from the magazine version. Our reluctant hero sets out to rescue his boss, and must cope with pirates, Amazons, various forms of hypnotic compulsion, and assorted absolute (and arrogant) monarchs. This book provides all the essential background to Krishna, more than the later volumes do. In *Zhamanak*, the hero is attempting to rescue a fair lady, impeded by various problems including the fact that he can't stand the woman. Shorter than *Zei* and less inventive, but sufficiently amusing to be well worth reading.

\* \* \*



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## **The Watcher in the Garden**

by Joan Phipson

Anatheum: \$10.95 (cloth)

## **Runes of the Lyre**

by Ardath Mahar

Anatheum: \$10.95 (cloth)

Two volumes not for the long-time science-fiction reader, but quite possibly ideal for that teen-age girl on your Christmas list that you never know quite what to buy for. *Watcher* is about a teen-age girl who, with the aid of a little magic, finds the source of her violent emotions (which is not what you might think), and learns to replace her outbursts with sweetness and light. Phipson has a talent for creating characters who are never quite normal — even, I suspect, when they're supposed to be. It gives her books a distinctive aura of strangeness, but doesn't make me like them any better. *Runes* concerns a girl running away from warfare, pillage, and personal abuse, who steps through a dimensional door where she merges personalities with The Queen Who Has Come Again. Suddenly, her problems change from staying alive to restoring order in the realm, fighting sorcery, righting wrongs, and keeping a watch on the awesome mental powers which the Queen persona is apt to use recklessly. The heroine's entirely saccharine personality turned me off, but the book seems ideal fare for a teen-age girl who has been forced by cruel parents to wash the dishes. Either book is quite suitable for teen-agers or younger who enjoy Disney movies.

## **WANNA BUY A DUCK?**

by Alan Dean Foster

### **The Fine Art of Walt Disney's**

#### **Donald Duck**

By Carl Barks

Another Fine Rainbow Publishing, Inc. (6743 First Avenue, Scottsdale, AZ 85251): \$200.00 (edition limited to 1875 copies)

## **Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge McDuck**

by Carl Barks

Celestial Arts Press: \$135.00

(edition limited to 5,000 copies)

Having read the above and noted the prices in particular, you may be permitted a moment or two to catch your breath. After all, it's not every day such beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated art books appear on the market.

What is puzzling to the uninitiated is why anyone would want to spend over three hundred dollars for two books about ducks. Not even real ducks. Imaginary ducks. Ducks that wear clothes only above the waist and talk about pollution and taxes and space travel. Ducks who are, in fact, more human than the inventions of most writers dealing with more familiar and less feathery bipeds. That this is so is due entirely to the genius of one man, a gentle and perceptive writer/artist named Carl Barks. It is no exaggeration to call Barks the Wagner of the comic books.

Born on a wheat ranch near Merrill, Oregon in 1901, Barks had a singularly isolated and villatic childhood. Displaying an early interest in cartooning, he eventually began selling mildly risqué and decidedly un-ducklike gags and cartoons to an early humor magazine, the *Calgary Eye-Opener*. After a number of years of contributing to this Minneapolis-based magazine, Barks had second thoughts about its (and his) future and moved to California to try his hand working for the young Walt Disney.

Beginning with a gag for one of the early Donald Duck cartoons, Barks soon found himself working exclusively

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is being born. Its soul resides in data  
banks from Wall Street  
to Red Square. It is neither good  
nor evil. But it is very dangerous. Angra  
Oil Corporation thinks it is just another  
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all be ensnared.

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on gags and drawings for the studio's number-one quacker. Unfortunately, the deafness which had plagued him since childhood made it increasingly difficult for him to participate in the frenetic camaraderie of the hydra-headed story sessions. Coupled with a dislike of the studio atmosphere, this led him to seek work elsewhere.

Beginning in 1942, Barks began to draw Donald and his nephews for Whitman Publishing Company's comic book, *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*. Barks was invited to suggest any story changes he thought advisable, and Whitman immediately discovered that they had not only an artist but a writer on their hands. This dual talent convinced Whitman to leave Barks pretty much to his resources, which would prove to be considerable. Thus Barks gained both the privacy and freedom he'd always sought, and he worked for Whitman until 1966.

Seeking an elderly, crotchety foil for Donald, Barks in 1948 created the most memorable and lasting of his original characters, not to mention a non-human member of the American mythological pantheon. At first no more than a minor character, Uncle Scrooge McDuck soon became so popular in his own right that by 1952 Whitman was compelled to provide him with his own comic book, a situation only fitting for the world's richest duck.

Scrooge rapidly evolved into the archetypical American billionaire, with one critically important exception. His fortune, his three cubic acres of money, was accumulated "on the square." Though often tempted to break the letter of the law, Scrooge never does more than push it.

Despite that, Scrooge is unarguably greedy, miserly, grouchy and in general, bad company at a party. No other comic artist ever began with such an

unsympathetic character, yet Scrooge always engenders our admiration and, yes, even sympathy. That Barks accomplishes this is a testament to his ability as a writer. Combined with his matchless line-drawing and sense of drama, this caused him to become known to millions of children simply as "the good artist."

Using the old ruse of "we're doing a research paper," a fan of Barks's work finally managed to pry the good artist's address out of the awesome anonymity of the Disney studio. At first Barks was doubtful that the fan letter was genuine, he suspected a friend of hoaxing him. But once exposed, the good artist could no more hide from the thousands of fans he'd created than Rembrandt could conceal himself from the Dutch burghers who wanted their portraits painted by him.

The extraordinary appeal of Barks's work is manifold. Instead of battling endless legions of two-dimensional superhero villains, Barks's ducks travel to real places on real adventures. The villains they encounter on such journeys have understandable ambitions. Few want to rule the world. Most just want to be rich. The Beagle Boys, another of Barks's inspired inventions, want to steal Scrooge's money not for metaphysical reasons but because they want to be as rich as he is.

In the Scrooge comics, which Barks has referred to as "condensed novels" (I prefer to think of them as story-boarded screenplays), many young readers first learned about King Solomon's mines, the Seven Cities of Cibola (which Barks places somewhere in Yuma County, by the way), the gold mines of the Incas, the Menhunes of Hawaiian mythology, and much more.

Barks labored to ensure that these stories were as accurate as he could possibly make them. Even in a story of



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pure fantasy such as "Land Beneath the Ground," wherein we learn the *real* cause of earthquakes, when Barks needs a "natural" radio, he pipes his broadcasts through slabs of germanium ore.

The first bit of spanish I ever learned were the words **quien sabe**, voiced by a professor in Barks's "Seven Cities of Cibola." The same story also mentions such diverse and non-comic items as the city of Indio, California; ollas, ocotillo and bear grass; Cortez, the history of the Colorado River, and more. Those who today decry comics as useless fodder for the maturing mind certainly never grew up reading Carl Barks.

Barks also had a way of summing up great issues in the short, sharp dialogue the brevity of his medium required. An example would be Scrooge saying, "The richest treasures are always found in the poorest places." Not many geologists would argue with that. "A cobbler should stick to his last," is the McDuck way of saying that you should only invest in what you know.

Archeology, investment strategy, geology, geography (I know how high Bolivia is because Scrooge went there to inspect one of his tin mines; the altitude in the panel is given in meters, of course), the Klondike; Barks's sources of story material seemed endless and encompassed the entire world.

The ducks who peopled this wonderful world and who lived in the fabled city of Duckburg (one of the hundreds of unincorporated communities in the Los Angeles megalopolis, in case you ever wondered where Duckburg was located) were as fully developed as those inhabiting any novel. Scrooge McDuck is an example. There is even a full-length (well, duck-length, anyway) biography of the great McDuck published by Mirage Press of Baltimore and penned by the well-known contemporary author Jack Chalker, another

Barks fan.

What is it that drives mature adults to such adulation of Barks's work? There's more to it than mere nostalgia, for men and women who would never admit to anything more than a pleasant memory of Superman and Blackhawk and Sgt. Rock turn positively garrulous at the mention of Scrooge. I think it's because Barks managed to make his characters so real that former readers remember them not as inventions but as biography. In Barks' hands Donald is no longer a duck; he is a fully rounded human being in duck form. That Barks was able to accomplish this for children is perhaps his greatest achievement.

One thing more. Those of us who grew up with Scrooge for company have less fear of aging than those children who did not. How many senior citizen heroes did the comics offer us? In the daily strips we had Daddy Warbucks and Mammy Yokum, but in the comics the heroes were all young, muscular, and healthy. Scrooge, on the other hand, is unarguably *old*. He can't see a thing without his glasses, he has problems with his memory, walks with a cane, and is subject to a wide variety of illnesses and afflictions associated with the aged.

This doesn't stop him from gallivanting all over the world, not to mention beneath it and off it, on strenuous adventures that would tax the resources of someone half his age. He does not turn suddenly young and healthy on these journeys; his age is always an integral part of the stories. Yet he copes.

The sight of this old *man* leading a healthy, vigorous life in spite of his infirmities had a powerful effect on Barks's young readers. Through Scrooge Barks takes pains to point out age's joy and benefits, such as the accumulation of wisdom. Scrooge gave many of us a

sense of immortality.

Useless comic books, indeed.

The growing recognition of Barks's individual genius over the past fifteen years has made the two books which provide the illustrations for this article possible. Who would buy such high-priced collections of duck tales? Writers, lawyers, doctors, civic leaders, all who were entertained as well as educated by the antics of Scrooge and his nephews. They remember.

The five years 1971-1976 were unique for Barks and for his fans because of the exceptional grant the Disney studio gave the duck man. A fan had requested an oil painting of the ducks, offering to pay Barks \$150 for the finished work no matter how it might turn out. The studio, to its everlasting credit, agreed to allow Barks to attempt the work as well as any possible subsequent ones. As Barks explains, this is akin to General Motors giving one of its workers permission to build and sell any Chevrolets he might construct in his garage.

These 122 oil paintings, which are collected in Another Rainbow Press's collection *The Fine Art of Walt Disney's Donald Duck*, are all the more notable for the fact that they represent Barks tackling an entirely new medium at the age of seventy-one. The results are unique in the annals of illustrative graphic art. They literally glow. They encapsulate everything Barks learned about drawing Donald and his relatives. As art, they stand on their own, apart from their humble origins.

Personality and drama leap from every plate. Barks's attention to detail, his remarkable sense of composition, are evident throughout the book. The volume is entitled, naturally, the McDuck edition, and is manifestly a work for adults to be proud of, though children will respond to it as readily as

to Barks's simpler comic work.

The other book, *Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge McDuck*, is for those of you who still wonder what all the shouting is about. Celestial Arts Press has taken a dozen of Barks's classic stories and had them entirely recolored, under Barks's direction, by the fine Australian artist Peter Ledger. Recoloring involved seven months of hard work with acrylics, oils, and airbrush. The result is a "comic book" the likes of which has never been seen before. All the drama and depth of Barks's line work is magnified twentyfold. The pages have texture alien to the days of the ten-center.

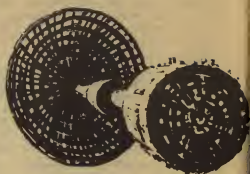
Censored pages from Barks's second Scrooge full-length story, "Back to the Klondike," are restored to the narrative (they were considered too violent and adult for the original comic book). Pages cut for reasons of length are restored to the story "Land Beneath the Ground."

Both of these exquisite books are testaments to the bookmakers' art as well as the work of Carl Barks. They are timeless as well as beautiful, the stories as readable today as they were in the forties and fifties. The fact that doctors and engineers and writers and filmmakers (George Lucas and Gary Kurtz in their comments in the Scrooge book) can admit freely to the influence Barks had in shaping their creative outlook is a mark of our society's aesthetic maturity.

For those of you who still don't fathom any of this duck talk, I recommend beginning with the Celestial Arts collection of stories and following with the volume of oils from Another Rainbow Press. They are particularly inspiring to young, hopeful artists.

For if one man can achieve worldwide fame and immortality through the drawing of ducks, who is to say this or that child should not embark on a career in art?





# VULCAN'S FORGE

by Poul Anderson

art: Karl Kofoed



AWAKE

INPUT: RV (SOL) 57932100 + 150, RA 3.33, DEC 7.05, DR/DT 5.42,  
D2R/DT2 3.51 -2.86, 7.90. . .

"Hello, there, Kitty. Everything okay?"

"Okay, boss. Blasting in about two minutes. You?"

"Going down soon. I'll resume contact in an hour or so. Good faring to you."

"Good faring to us both, boss."

INPUT: BB TEMP 522, EM SPEC DIST. . . .

Mercury is small, hard, a mass drawn inward on itself (iron, nickel, silicate . . .), day ablaze, night afreeze as I swing in my winging around. My shield glows radio-hot, for its sunward side is white light-hot. Solar wind whistles and hails. Here is no seething of it in a changeable magnetic cauldron nor interplay of gravities as at Jupiter, no swirl of moonlets about Saturn. But silence the memory bank, now in this new mission. Do not raise Wanda's ghost, not yet.

COMPUTE BLAST VECTORS

READY ALL SYSTEMS TO GO

Caloris Base was forever undermanned. No matter the pay, technicians were few who would serve there; it was a dismal and sometimes dangerous outpost, where equipment kept breaking down under conditions that were still scantily understood. Six months off after six months on were not always enough for nerves to recuperate. Turnover became high, which meant a chronic dearth of experienced personnel, which compounded the problem. The scientists for whom the place existed were in better case, with an endlessness of discoveries to make, so that some returned more than once and a cadre had made Mercury their careers. However, they too were overworked while on the planet.

Thus it happened that even when a living legend arrived, only one person took the time to greet him. That was Ellen Lyndale. The man at ground control didn't count, nor the driver who would fetch the newcomer.

Alone in the common room, she switched fluoros off and let the view leap at her eyes. Upward the simulacrum went, from floor to zenith, as if she stood on the surface a hundred meters above her. Night neared an end. The stars remained ice-brilliant in their myriads, Earth glowed sapphire not far from the Milky Way, she thought she saw Luna as an atom of gold beside it. But zodiacal light hovered ghostly above the eastern horizon, and solar corona was climbing after it. The mother-of-pearl gleam fell on a landscape that curved away, beneath this mountain-top, in crags, craters, boulders, ridges, dark dustiness of the basin rock, until all at once it dropped out of sight under that sky. A warmth and a breath of flower-scented air only made the scene colder. Some hours

hence, they would only make it more of a furnace.

*Regulus* lifted above a cliff and crossed the constellations. In low orbit, the supply ship moved fast. Its shield being aimed toward the sun, Lyndale saw just a half-disc, whose brightness would have blinded her if the scanners had not stopped it down. Her attention went to the pair of smaller cabochons accompanying it. One drifted sideways as the shuttlecraft to which it belonged left the mother vessel, bearing Jeremy Ashe down to her. The other trailed yet. Her pulse quickened. Behind yonder shield was *Kittiwake*.

The scout also broke free, accelerating on ion jets that formed a lacy smoke, soon dissipated, well aft of it, and departed her vision, Vulcan bound. She looked back at the shuttle. Entering Mercury's shadow, the shield grew dim. Presently she made out the boat itself, and then the countermass and the metal spiderwebbing that held everything together. Meanwhile *Regulus* passed upper culmination and began to set, until she could see its hull too, larger by far than the boat's but distance-dwindled to a splinter, trailing a foreshortened dull circle that was the convex side of its own shield.

The shuttle descended to a landing court fused into the regolith below the mountain. In her view, it became a parasol, or a mushroom cap. . . . For an instant she was a child again, barefoot in a Kentucky greenwood, where soil squooshed cool and damp between her toes, mushrooms clustered on a sun-flecked mossy log, and a mockingbird sang . . . . The car that scuttled forth went under it like a beetle seeking cover. She visualized airlock extensors osculating and Ashe climbing through. The car reappeared and returned to the vehicle chamber. She visualized Ashe getting out, walking across the floor, taking the elevator that would bring him to this level.

The hall door opened. He entered.

"Oh!" Startled despite herself, she switched the lights on again. Stars receded. Furniture changed from shadows to chairs and tables, 3V screen and music speakers, all a bit shabby and very outmoded. "Welcome, Captain Ashe," she said. "I'm Ellen Lyndale. It's an honor meeting you."

She wasn't surprised when he approached with a smooth low-gravity glide. It generally took a while to adapt to any given weight, and he had been more than a year on Earth, then under boost aboard *Regulus*. In three decades, though, from end to end of the Solar System, he must have undergone every acceleration the human body could endure. She was taken aback at how much older he looked than the pictures she had seen — tall, craggy, hair a gray bristle above a deeply trenched face.

His handshake was brief, his glance impersonal. "How d'you do, Dr. Lyndale." A trace of British accent lingered to clip his tones. "I've studied your work, of course. Still, you'll have quite a lot to explain to me

in a short time." He paused. "And doubtless I to you."

"I'm sorry no one else is here. So's everybody. But the sun's doing unusual things, which the solar investigators have to keep track of, and the planet scientists are preparing an expedition to the North Jumbles, and biochem recycle has chosen this exact moment to develop a collywobble — nothing to fear, but it has to be corrected immediately —"

"No matter. I understand."

"Director Sanjo is planning a dinner party this evenwatch. Meanwhile I'll show you to your quarters and you can rest. And if you'd like some refreshment, or anything else we can provide, please tell me."

He shook his head. "No, thanks. Just have my baggage brought to my room. Let's you and I get cracking."

She started. "What?"

"You heard me," he snapped. "*Kittiwake's* en route to Vulcan. She'll make rendezvous within a hundred hours, unless we change the thrust, and we can't decide about that without proper data, can we? Besides, I promised her I'd call as soon as possible. Come along, young lady, lead on."

INPUT: — PROTON FLUX 15.8, HELIUM+ 0.05, HELIUM++ 0.03 —

"Kitty."

"Acknowledging, boss. Everything well so far."

The great paraboloid of my shield wards off the fury ahead, brings it to a focus and hurls it back, a lance of radiance. Energy does penetrate, but into multiple layers of solid-state cells behind the reflector surface; electrons leap through their dances of being and not-being, of quantum death and transfiguration; that which emerges on my side is largely of long wavelengths to which I am transparent, and all that emerges is diffused by curvature, with little ever impinging on me. That is enough to heat me somewhat, by those photons in its spectrum which make the crystals of my body ring. I feel the shivering through my sensors, record and transmit it together with the other data torrenting upon me. But my essential self remains cool enough, the delicate balance that maintains it is undisturbed.

The sun grows and its bearing changes as I drive onward. The shield swings slowly in its framework, to stay between me and destruction. Opposite, the counter-mass moves too; and therefore my thrust vectors must change, lest the couple throw a torque upon me that will send me spinning out of control. Meanwhile, the gale that blows from the sun casts eddies around the edge of the shield, that lick at the spindle which is my hull.

The planets and moons in the cold outer reaches were not like this. But we are explorers, my boss and I and our memories of Wanda.



"Are you sure, Kitty? Caution is the doctrine."

"I'll have to work fast at Vulcan, you know. Less risky than taking any longer than necessary in those parts."

"You're not there yet. Double check your self-monitor."

The time lag between us is 215 milliseconds, 216, 217, 218 . . .

SWITCH

COMPUTE

PROCEED

"Okay," Ashe grunted. "For the time being, at least." He set the board to receive-record-standby and leaned back. Against the obscurity in an otherwise deserted communications room, glow from the sweep-survey scope flickered across the harshness of his face like green firelight.

Lyndale sat forward in her own chair. Shock tingled faintly through her skin. "Were you . . . talking . . . to the scout?" she asked. It had not been audible, but she had seen his lips move, and stiffen as he listened to whatever came in through the earphones he had now doffed. And his fingers had been less active on the keys than hers would have been.

He regarded her for seconds, not as other men did. She was considered handsome, in a rangy, square-jawed fashion, but she had a feeling that he was looking straight at what lay beneath. Briefly she wondered if he could see it, whatever it was. Jeremy Ashe had been a loner since his wife's death a dozen years ago; and before then they had been a pair of loners, taking the scout on missions that kept them out many months on end, moving only in a narrow social group on Earth. Wanda Ashe died when an oxygen valve failed on a moon of Neptune, Lyndale remembered, and afterward her widower refused to take another partner but somehow, incredibly, singlehanded *Kittiwake*. No, Lyndale thought, Jeremy Ashe knew much about the universe but probably little about humankind.

He nodded at last. "The program includes several special features," he said. "Speech is one. It's often more convenient than a digital code, quicker, yes, actually more accurate in some cases. I couldn't operate as I do without it."

"Er — well — excuse me, I don't mean to pry or anything, but — talking with a, a machine like that, instead of another person —"

He barked a chuckle. "Indeed. The old joke. A spaceman by himself needn't worry when he starts talking to the machinery, unless it starts talking back to him." A shrug. "My employers know, and don't mind as long as I continue to perform well, but it is a reason for me to avoid publicity. However, what makes you think I am not dealing with another person?"

"That computer?" she exclaimed, shocked afresh.

"The hardware has as much data-processing capability as anything this side of the Turing Laboratories," he reminded her. "More to the

point, the software is special. It contains the entire . . . experience . . . we have had together." Irritation: "But I've neither time nor patience for stale arguments about what consciousness 'is.' My working methods are what they are, their record speaks for itself, and when this Vulcan project was first proposed, my name was the first that came up. So can we get to work, you and I, Dr. Lyndale?"

She bridled. Arrogant bastard, she thought. Had she known, she could have gotten somebody else. Valdez and Chiang of *Albatross* were famous; Ostrowski and Ronsard were still operating *Cormorant*, which they had flown past the sun out of this very base while she was an infant — She had not known, but had been delighted when the Syndicate offered her the services of *Kittiwake*.

"I assumed you were amply briefed, Captain Ashe," she said. "Lord knows we had plenty of exchanges. The mission profile's agreed on. All you've got to do is carry it out, bring your scout back aboard *Regulus*, and go home."

"You know the matter's not that simple, not by a light-year," he snapped. "If it were, an ordinary unmanned probe would do — and the results wouldn't interest you, would they? We're up against something unique. We'll have to make decisions, quite possibly crucial decisions, as the information arrives . . . at the end of a minimum three-minute transmission time. Must I go on repeating the obvious?"

She curbed her temper. Make allowances for him, she told herself; he's not used to dealing with people.

And in his way, he's right, her mind added. Six minutes for a laser beam to go from Mercury to Vulcan and back. Anything can happen in six minutes, given the mystery that Vulcan is. And every Earth-day, the asteroid will briefly swing behind the sun, barred from us. At best, *Kittiwake* is going to be in tenuous touch with its master.

Master? No, don't get anthropomorphic; don't get crazy. *Kittiwake* is nothing but a spacecraft carrying sensors and computers — and, for the first time in its wanderings, a clumsy sunshield —

"Of course not, Captain Ashe," she said. "We'll have to cooperate right down the line. But I thought everything that anybody could imagine had been discussed in detail beforehand."

"Discussed," he answered. "No substitute for reality. See here, Dr. Lyndale. Supposedly you're the planetologist who believes there's something important to be learned from Vulcan, and I'm the operator of the scout that'll send the raw data to you. We don't know what those data are going to be — else what's the point of the whole exercise? — and will have to instruct the scout as we begin to get an idea of what to look for."

She decided that he did not really mean to insult her by talking down, but was trying to make a point that had never quite come out in the open, if only because one party or the other took it for granted.

He rewarded her patience, in a fashion. "But far more is involved," he said. "The very survival of the boat, under those difficult and poorly known conditions. I've swotted them up as best I was able, but you — you and the whole scientific team here — you're the ones who've lived with them, month after month or year after year. What's needed is a — an understanding, an integration of minds, so if something goes amiss we can immediately think what to do — " His fist smote the chair arm. "Hell and damnation! I asked for several weeks on Mercury to develop it before we launched *Kittiwake*, but — time and funds — everybody too busy — "

He swallowed hard, and she thought, suddenly, that it was his own pride he was getting down.

"We need to know each other better," he finished in a mumble, while his look strayed from hers.

Her pique dissolved. She reached forward and caught his hand. "Oh, yes," she said. "I understand now. Let me start by showing you through my lab and telling you what I've been doing. But later you'll have to share yourself with us, you know."

INPUT [navigational, interpreted]: The spacecraft is in free fall. (It wouldn't be feasible to boost the whole distance. That would mean too great a delta V. Come time to decelerate for Vulcan rendezvous, the direction of blast would necessarily be such as to expose the hull to the direct gaze of the sun, at a distance of less than two and a half million kilometers from its photosphere. The vessel could endure that, as could its basic wired-in programs, but not — for more than a few minutes — the precision instruments, nor the electronics that think and remember.) On trajectory, approaching.

INPUT [physical, interpreted]: Radiation of every kind significantly higher than predicted. Spots, flares, prominences, violence, a firestorm in the solar atmosphere.

TRANSMIT DATA

No response. Boss not there.

OPTICAL SCAN: Target acquired.

COMPARE INPUT WITH DATA IN PROGRAM

MEMORY: Observation from Mercury has revealed what seems to be an asteroid sufficiently close to the sun that its metallic body is molten. It was presumably perturbed into that orbit, which is decaying for reasons that are obscure, and thus it may yield information about solar weather and other processes over a long timespan. Details are impossible to retrieve from afar. Direct investigation is necessary.

COMPARE PREVIOUS MISSIONS WHERE APPLICABLE

Awhirl through the radiation maelstrom around Jupiter, but then Wanda and Jerry were on Callisto, waiting for my word, waiting together.

\* \* \*

There was abundant cause to celebrate. The regular arrivals of the supply ship always gave occasion — seeing its crew again, bidding farewell to persons going off duty, welcoming their replacements, hearing the kind of stories from elsewhere that don't get on newsbeams, receiving the kind of gifts and handwritten messages from home that can't be borne in a lasergram — This visit was additional, unscheduled, and had brought a man who could tell of marvels.

Ashe was rather stiff at first, but a good meal, preceded by drinks, accompanied by wine, and followed by cognac, mellowed him somewhat. He was actually patient when young Sven Ewald, fresh in from a long field trip, asked him what the purpose of his task was. "I mean, *ja*, I realize an asteroid like that has been subjected to intense irradiation. But they tell me it has melted. Does that not hopelessly mix things together?"

Ashe nodded at Lyndale, who sat beside him. "Your department," he said with a slight smile. It made crinkles around his eyes which told her that once he had often laughed. "Kitty and I are merely running your errands for you."

"Why don't you explain?" she suggested. "I'm apt to get more technical than is called for."

Under cover of the tablecloth, she fended the hand of Bill Seton, who sat on her right, off her knee. He was not a bad sort, but he was in love with her and had gotten a trifle drunk. She felt sorry for him, but not enough to give encouragement. The fact that she was among the unmarried at Caloris did not mean that she chose to be among either the celibate or the promiscuous. She confined herself to a pair of close male friends, neither of whom happened to be present. There would be time for real involvements when her work here was done and she returned to the University of Oregon — and then, she hoped, it would be a single involvement, for the rest of her life.

Her lovers were not the only individuals missing from the officers' mess, out of the hundred-odd on the planet. She had counted twenty attenders, including the six off *Regulus*. Little Mercury was an entire world, bearing centuries' worth of mysteries; and that was not to speak of the sun, ambient space, certain stellar observations best conducted on this site, and lately Vulcan. Leisure was rare and absences were frequent.

Yet an effort had been made to brighten the room: a change of pictures on the walls, flowers from the hydroponics section, music lilting out of speakers. A blank viewscreen was like a curtain drawn against the searing day that had dawned beyond these caves.

"Well," she heard Ashe saying, "we think probably some solid material still exists, slag floating on the surface, and it will have a radioactive record. However, if convection has kept the liquid reasonably well mixed, that should have tended to protect it from repeated bombardment. Kitty's instruments ought to identify isotopes in the melt

that aren't in the slag. Also, magnetic phenomena, in a mass like that, ought to reveal something about the solar field, its variations, and about the solar wind which carries it outward. As for what else we may find, who can tell? We never know beforehand, do we?"

Director Sanjo Mamoru relaxed his usual austerity to declare, as eagerly as a boy, "If anyone can testify how full of surprises the cosmos is, it is you, sir."

"Oh, now," Ashe demurred, "the people who make the discoveries are the specialists who interpret the data. Such as Dr. Lyndale."

She wondered why she flushed. "I think what he was getting at was the . . . the adventure," she said. "You must have had some fabulous experiences."

He withdrew toward his shell. "I go by the old proverb, that adventures happen to the incompetent."

Emboldened, she replied: "That can't be true. At least, nobody is competent to foresee everything in a universe where we're only . . . dustmotes, dayflies. I've seen accounts of what happened to your colleagues on their explorations. You've simply never wanted public attention, never been a glory hound, isn't that right?"

"If you do not mind," Sanjo pursued, "I have long been curious about precisely what occurred on your first Saturn mission. The news media only quoted you as mentioning difficulties which had been overcome."

"As a matter of fact," added the skipper of *Regulus*, "I got interested myself and checked the professional journals. All you did was warn against instruments icing over in the rings, because of particle collisions kicking water molecules loose. You advised future scouts to carry exterior heating elements. But what did you, caught by surprise, what exactly did *you* do?"

Ashe hesitated, gripped his brandy snifter, abruptly drained it. Lyndale poured him a refill. "C'mon," she urged. "You're among your own kind here. And you were underlining the need to get acquainted."

"Well — " said Ashe. "Well." He cleared his throat.

And somehow he got talking, remembering aloud, for a couple of hours, and wonder exploded around him.

He did not passively follow orders. He could not. Every flight was unique, requiring its special preparations, and he must always be the arbiter, often the deviser of these. Upon this evenwatch, which was not night where it ventured, *Kittiwake* traveled behind a sunshield, against heat, hard x-rays, a storm of stripped atoms. But at Neptune, danger had lain in the cryogenic cold of atmosphere, and at Io in volcanic spasms, and at the comets in whirling stones, and —

Nor did Ashe merely sit at a remote control board. Even in a mother ship, the challenges were countless, anything from survival to a simple and perhaps hilarious housekeeping problem; and usually he had been

ground-based, left to cope with the strangenesses around him while his scout went seeking beyond. Or, rather, his and her scout, formerly when Wanda lived; he could not have carried on alone afterward without the knowledge they had won as a pair.

Jupiter had risen before him, lion-tawny, banded with clouds and emblazoned with hurricanes that could have swallowed Earth whole, weather into which he sent his quester plunging while its laser beams scribbled word of lightnings and thunders too vast for imagining. Saturn reigned coldly serene over a ring-dance whose measures no man really understood, and the chemistries within its air should not have happened but did. From the ice abyss wherein it lay, the core of Uranus uttered magnetic and seismic whispers about the ancient catastrophe which had wrenched sideways the whole spin of the planet. A sun that was no more than the brightest of the stars cast its glade over a Neptunian ocean that was not water, lapping against shores that were not stone. The faintest of rainbows glimmered on Pluto's frozenness, as if to declare that it was the mightiest of the comets and bore witness to the beginning of the worlds. Elfin lights flitted across the murk of Persephone — But to listeners, none of it was altogether inhuman, for they belonged in the same universe whose majesty was being revealed.

It was not that Ashe was an eloquent man, it was that he had known what he had known and done what he had done, on behalf of them all.

— "Goodnight, folks. . . . Work tomorrow. . . . I hope the rest of our personnel will get a chance to hear you, sir. . . . Thank you. . . . Goodnight, goodnight."

Lyndale found herself leaving side by side with Ashe. She glanced upward, into the furrowed countenance and the eyes that remained Sirius-blue; on an impulse, she murmured, "Are you sleepy?"

"Not quite," he said. "Too much to think about. Well, I have a book to read in bed."

"If you'd like to stop by my room, we could — talk some more."

He halted. For a moment they stood motionless in the corridor. Colleagues moved around them, right and left, carefully paying no heed, until they were alone among amateur murals, scenes of Earth, that suddenly looked forlorn.

Ashe bit his lip. "Sorry," he said in a rough voice. "You're kind, but I do have too much to think about. Goodnight."

He turned and well-nigh bounded from her.

She stared after him, well past his vanishing around a corner. Wine-warmth faded away. Her disappointment was slight, she realized. It had been a matter of wanting to know him better and, all right, admit it, a degree of hero worship. However, she didn't collect men. Probably this way was best, an unadorned partnership while the undertaking lasted.

I don't think there's anything wrong with him, she reflected. He's

simply, well, married to his scoutcraft. Because it's full of memories of his wife? I gather she was a big, beautiful, free-striding Valkyrie of a woman; and they denied themselves children, for the sake of the enterprise they shared.

Lyndale sighed and sought her own bed.

INPUT [navigational, interpreted]: The asteroid is a globule 453.27 kilometers in equatorial diameter. . . . Notably less in polar diameter. . . . Mass consistent with a largely ferrous composition. . . . EM SPEC. . . . bears out composition. . . . Doppler shift indicates a very high rate of rotation. . . .

OPTICAL TRANSMISSION: The solar disc fills a monstrous 25+ degrees in a sky which its corona whitens around it. Flames fountain. The vortices that are sunspots form lesser brilliances amidst the chaos. Vulcan does not show a smooth crescent; dark drifts of slag make it seem ragged, although where the metal is not covered, it is incandescent.

"Maneuvering, boss, to establish orbit around the object."

"Careful, Kitty, careful. Keep your instruments busy."

RADIATION: Already suggestive of certain isotopes, but with anomalies.

GAS COUNT

"No more than that, Kitty? How?" *Something has to have provided enough resistance to circularize the orbit, and to cause the slow decay of it that radar from Mercury has detected.* "Maybe occasional flares reach farther, at higher densities, than we knew? No, that can scarcely be."

MAGNETIC FLUX [interpreted]: Suddenly intense, and crazily writhing!

INPUT [interior monitors]: Loss of attitude control. Torque. Blast of direct solar radiation.

EMERGENCY EMERGENCY EMERGENCY

"Assume quickest attainable parking orbit!" Ashe yelled. "Redeploy your shield!" His fingers sprang across the console and his commands sped off.

He sank back. A shudder went through him. "Three minutes transmission time," he rasped. "How much can happen in three minutes?"

The texts and graphics on the display screens around them dropped out of Lyndale's awareness. They were being recorded anyhow. She reached from her chair and caught Ashe's fist, which rested helpless on his thigh. "But surely the scout can take care of itself," she breathed. "Why did you send orders at all?"

His gaze never left the view from Vulcan. Images gyrated, now a lurid flicker, now a glimpse of the asteroid, now the distant stars. Sweat glistened on his skin. She smelled its sharpness and felt her own atrickle

beneath her coverall.

His head jerked through a nod. "Yes, of course the program is capable of judgment, if it's working. It may not be. What I've tried to provide is backup against that contingency. Except — when almost everything is unknown — What's gone wrong?"

She mustered courage. "That's for us to find out. Let's not assume that any terrible damage has been done, before we get word. Supposing it has, we've a better chance of helping if we've stayed cool, correct?"

He turned his regard upon her and let it dwell for what seemed a long while. "Thank you," he said at last.

That scout is his life, she thought. It's this having to wait while the signals travel to and fro that rips at him. But he's rallying well. I never doubted he would.

They fled into technical discussion. The problem was to evaluate the information they had, which was mostly phrased in numbers, and whatever else came in, and deduce what the truth was, yonder where *Kittiwake* suffered.

Response arrived. It was greatly heartening. The spacecraft had succeeded in making itself a satellite of Vulcan, on a path eccentric but reasonably stable. Its shield was again precessing properly, to shadow it from the sun. It was even taking measurements anew, though Ashe and Lyndale suspected that some of the instruments were no longer reliable. When the soprano voice said, not through earphones this time but out of a speaker, "Yes, I'm still myself, boss," Ashe whistled softly and wiped at his eyes.

Thereafter he rejoined Lyndale in the effort to establish the parameters of the situation.

— "M-m, well, see here, what say we check out the magnetic properties of such an object? Can your data banks supply what we need for computing that, Ellen?"

"Good idea. I'd better give Ram Krishnamurti a buzz. He's our resident mathematical genius, and I suspect we're going to come up with a function that'll be a bitch to integrate — "

The hours passed. They lost themselves.

— "I think we're on the right track, Jerry, but our notion's no use till we've made it quantitative. If the jets were involved, that's your baby."

"And yours. We'll have to write the field equations — "

It was a hunt, a creating, a communion.

At the end, exhausted and exalted, they looked into each other's countenances while Ashe hoarsely recorded a summary.

"The trouble is nobody's fault. It was unforeseeable, in the absence of precise knowledge we didn't have, knowledge that it was our whole purpose to gather. We believe the following is the basic explanation.

"Being mainly liquid metal, Vulcan is a conductor. Orbiting, it cuts the



solar magnetic field, and so generates eddy currents. The field is ordinarily weak at that distance from the poles, and there was no reason to suppose the inductive effect would be more than incidental. However, it turns out that a number of other factors come into play, orders of magnitude stronger than expected and, incidentally, accounting for the observed orbital decay.

“Solar storms produce violent local fluctuations in the field, which are carried outward by solar wind. The asteroid rotates remarkably fast; moreover, this close to a sun that no longer acts as a point mass, it is also precessing and nutating at high rates. The fluid mechanics of that are such as to create turbulences in the circulation of molten material, which in turn are reinforced by reflections off the solid slag, in changeable patterns too complex to be calculated by us. Accordingly, powerful and rapidly varying currents are set up. The asteroid is massive enough that these would dwindle only slowly if left alone — and they are not left alone, but instead are reinforced by every shift in the ambient field. Thus they generate magnetism of their own, of significant intensity at considerable distances from Vulcan. Naturally, this field declines on a steep curve. In effect, the asteroid is surrounded by an irregular and variable shell of force with quite a sharp boundary.

“When *Kittiwake* crossed that border, the ion jets were thrown out of proper collimation. It was not by much, but sufficed for a torque to appear. The sunshield and its counter mass shifted out of position, exposing the spacecraft to full solar irradiation. What harm was done before this was corrected is still uncertain.

“But the spacecraft did maneuver into Vulcan orbit, where it remains pending further assessments. It is carrying out the planned studies wherever possible — ”

An alarm shrilled, a set of lights flashed red: a cry for help, across fifty-five million kilometers.

INPUT [navigational, interpreted]: Drifting inward, accelerating as the asteroid's feeble pull intensifies with nearness.

MAGNETIC SURGE

Control motor malfunctions and shield moves aside again. A blast of energy.

COMPUTE COMPENSATING VECTORS FOR INTERIOR GYROSCOPES

INPUT [observational data, interpreted]: Spectrum indicates approximately 75% Fe, 30% Ni, 6% C, 3%

CANCEL. Does not correspond to possibility.

MONITOR INSTRUMENTATION

COMPARE ANALOGOUS PRIOR SITUATIONS

I prowled the red murk of Titan. The aerodynamic system to which I

was coupled ceased to function. I went into glide mode and signalled the ground. Wanda took control, to pilot me down to safety. She saw through my optics, felt through my equilibrators, and what she did, what she was in that moment, entered my data bank, became one with the program that was me. Hark back to how she guided my wildly bucking hull. Be Wanda once more.

#### FAILURE OF GYROSCOPIC COMPENSATION COMPUTER MALFUNCTION

INPUT: A veering, a spin, end over end. Heat soars. Electrons break free of all restraint.

#### CALL FOR ASSISTANCE

MEMORY: The transmission lag. Survival. How Wanda laid hand on me.

Her presence and the boss and whirl downward crack-crack-crack bzzz whirr-r the hand slips

burns

crumbles

#### FAILURE OF MEMORY

LOGIC CIRCUITS: Evaluate. Help.

COMPUTE xvzwandajkl15734 SANITY IS 3.14159277777777

The mountains of Mercury were not so stark as the face that Ashe turned toward Lyndale.

"The software's wrecked," he said, flat-voiced, like a man too newly wounded to feel pain. She saw the electronic equipment crowding tall around him and had an illusion that it had begun to press inward. A ventilator whimpered. "Another unpredictable high EMF, another exposure, and this one too great, too prolonged. Temperature — secondary radiation from particles that struck the hull . . . I've got to abort the mission."

Her hand lifted, as if of itself, as if to fend off a blow. "Is the system actually that vulnerable?" she protested, already conscious of the futility. "Why, in early days probes skimmed the solar atmosphere."

"Oh, yes, the spacecraft carcass is sound, including the standard programs. But I've told you about the special software, the accumulation of years which makes *Kittiwake* more than a probe — intricate, sensitive; encoded on the molecular level and below; quantum resonances — It's been disrupted."

"What will you do?"

"Override the autopilot and bring her back. Fast, under full acceleration, before worse happens. Repair may yet be possible. Unlikely, I admit. But we won't know, we're bound to lose everything, if we don't try."

She gulped and nodded. "Certainly. We'll organize . . . a later

expedition . . . taking advantage of this experience . . . Let me call, oh, Jane Megarry. She's our best remote controller, I think."

"No!" He swung back toward the console. Green highlights played over the bones in his countenance. "I'll do the job myself. Just bring coffee, sandwiches, and stimulol."

Lyndale half rose. "But Jerry, you've been here for hours, you're worn down to a thread, and directing will be hard, over those distances and with an unknown amount of crippling."

"At full thrust, I can have her back within twenty-four hours. And under way, who could ask her what's wrong except me? Get out!" Ashe cried. "Leave me alone!"

Abruptly Lyndale believed she understood. Breath left her. She stumbled from the room.

INPUT: ZXVMNRRR

COMPUTE: 7777777777

whirling whirling whirling

"Kitty, are you there? Can you answer?"

"Boss, Wanda, no no no, remembrance, too long, gongola. . . ."

TRANSMISSION TIME: Eternal.

"Kitty, I'm going to try something desperate, a shock signal, hang on, Kitty."

THUNDER FIRE DARKNESS

"Are you there, Kitty?"

"Ngngngngngng, baba, roll, pitch, yaw, gone gone gone gone gone gone gone gone."

TRANSMISSION TIME: Null, for all is null.

"I'm shutting you off, Kitty. Goodnight."

OBLIVION

Director Sanjo's office reflected his public personality, everything minimal, ordered, disciplined, the thermostat set low; a Hokusai print hung opposite the desk, but it was of a winter scene.

Yet genuine concern dwelt in his voice: "Do you mean that Ashe went up to *Regulus* as soon as his scout was in the cargo bay?"

Lyndale raised her weary head. "Yes. He more or less browbeat Captain Nguma into letting him commandeer the shuttleboat."

"But after his time on duty — he must be completely worn out."

"If he were anybody else, I'd say he was dead on his feet. But he isn't anybody else. He can't rest. Not till he's finished."

Sanjo frowned. "Finished? What do you mean? What remains for him other than a return to Earth?"

"He . . . first he wants to bring the scouting program down for . . . examination."

Sanjo's scowl deepened. "That doesn't make sense. We haven't a proper computer lab. What can he do? Earth is the place for a study of that material. Ashe risks distorting it worse; and it is, after all, no more his property than the boat is."

Lyndale stiffened. "The Syndicate necessarily gives him broad discretion."

"Yes-s." The man hesitated. "I merely wonder if fatigue may not have blunted his judgment. There is probably much to learn from analysis of that software."

Lyndale's tone roughened. "Uh-huh. Putting it through its paces, over and over and over."

Sanjo peered closer at her. "The matter concerns you too, Ellen. You want another Vulcan mission, no? From this failure they can discover how to succeed."

"I think we know enough already to take due precautions."

"Using the same program, appropriately reinstructed?"

Lyndale shrugged. Of course the Syndicate had copies, updated after each flight. *Kittiwake's* entire existence prior to the Mercury trip could be plugged back into the machinery. "Depends on what Jerry Ashe decides. He may refuse to make a second attempt, in which case we'll have to get somebody else. But I am hoping he'll agree." She looked at her watch. "Maybe I can persuade him. He ought to be landing shortly. Will you excuse me, please?"

Sanjo's gaze followed her out the door. He kept his thoughts to himself.

A fifty-centimeter carboplast sphere with a few electrical inlets contained *Kittiwake's* uniqueness. Ashe cradled it in his arms. Sometimes he murmured to it.

Lyndale awaited him at the elevator gate. Otherwise the corridor was empty and only the moving air made any sound. At this point of its daily chemical cycle, its odor recalled smoke along the Kentucky hills in October.

"Hi," she said quietly, into his haggardness. "How're you doing?"

His words grated: "I function. See here, I explained before going aloft that I'll require use of the electronics laboratory. Not for long, but I must not be interrupted."

"Why?" she demanded. "You never made that clear."

Now his answer lurched, like the feet of a man about to fall down at the end of his trail, fall down and sleep. "Certain studies. Of what may have gone awry. I want to do them while the facts are fresh in my mind. Remember, I have a special feeling about this that nobody else can ever have."

"Yes," she said, "you do." She took his arm. "Okay, I've arranged it. We'll have the place to ourselves."



He grew taut beneath her hand. "We? No, I told you, I can't have interference."

"I think you can use some help, though." Her steadiness astonished her. "Or at least somebody who cares, to stand by while you do what you've got to do; and later join you in facing the music. Facing it down."

"What?"

She urged him forward. He came along. "We can get away with it," she said, "if we stay in control of ourselves. We'll have made a blunder. Not unnatural, under these extraordinary circumstances. It won't destroy our careers."

He kept silence until they were in the laboratory and she had closed the door. Beyond surrounding apparatus, a viewscreen gave an image of the hell that was Mercury's day. Shakily careful, he put the sphere down on a workbench. Then he turned to her and gripped her shoulders with fingers that bruised.

"Why are you doing this, Ellen? What's it to you?"


She bore her pain and confronted his. "What you let slip earlier," she answered. "But do you honestly believe that program, when it's activated — that it's aware? Alive?"

"I don't know." He released her. "I only know it's all there's left of Wanda." He stared downward. "You see, I strapped her body to a signal

rocket and sent it into the planetary atmosphere. She became a shooting star. But everything she and I had done was in this casket of code." He stroked it.

"Replacements exist."

"Oh, yes, and I'll be using them. But *this* one is hurt, deranged, alone in the dark. Shall I let them rouse it back on Earth and take it through its madness once more, twice, a hundred times, for the sake of a little wretched information? Or shall I wipe it clean?"

"And give her peace. Yes. I understand." Lyndale picked up the sphere. "Come, let's do it, you and I. Afterward we can rest." 

*Poul Anderson has been one of the most prolific and superior contributors to the field for over thirty years. He has won many awards, most recently the 1982 Nebula for a novella, "The Saturn Game." Forthcoming Anderson books include another volume of the Psychotechnic League series from Tor Books, Starship, and a massive novel, tentatively entitled Orion Shall Rise, to be published by Timescape in the Spring of 1983. In the planning stages is a fantasy novel, in collaboration with his wife, Karen; the two of them returned from Brittany and France a few months ago, where they did research for this project.*

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### **ON WRITING SCIENCE FICTION (The Editors Strike Back!)**

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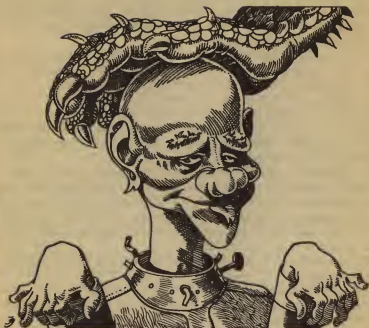
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# MONKEY BUSINESS

by Jack C. Haldeman II

art: Jack Gaughan



*Now writing full time, the author in the past has been a research biologist, printer's devil, medical technologist in a trauma unit, gardner, beach bum, photographer, statistician, file clerk, pharmacist's assistant, bartender, mechanic, and some other things he'd prefer to forget. He's been chairman of the 32nd World Science Fiction Convention (Discon II, in Washington D.C., back in 1974); your editor can sympathize with this last, since we were Chairman of Discon I in 1963.*

The aliens landed while we were showing *War of the Worlds*. No one was surprised.

For almost two months the papers had been full of articles about them. Probes sent back detailed pictures of their ships as they came across the solar system. They were always in the news. Even so, we didn't find out much about them. The only thing we knew for sure was that they were headed for Earth.

Nothing changed much for me. I still tore the tickets in half and ran the popcorn machine. We'd already scheduled a Burt Reynolds festival, but we slipped in sci-fi flicks whenever we could. That was fine with me. *Forbidden Planet* is one of my favorites.

We watched them land on television. It was pretty exciting for about an hour. Their space ships looked a lot like soap bubbles. There must have been a thousand of them. When they floated to the ground it was like some orbiting dishwasher had gone crazy. They were all over the place. Some of them landed near cities, but just as many settled down in the country or in deserts. It didn't seem to matter. After their ships landed they stayed inside. We waited for them to come out, but they didn't. For almost a year nothing happened.

Even the novelty wore off after a while. Most of the scientists gave up and moved on to other things. The military finally decided the aliens weren't a threat. There were so many of them they didn't even make much of a tourist attraction. One had landed outside of town and I went there a few times. There wasn't much to see, though, just some shadows moving around inside the bubble.

When the bubbles finally opened and the aliens came out it was pretty disappointing.

I guess we'd been expecting monsters or something. We'd been showing *Invaders from Mars* all week so I was ready for anything. The truth is that they looked a whole lot like us, except they were taller and skinnier. Sure, their arms were too long and they had too many fingers, but that didn't amount to much. Some folks made a big deal because they were yellow, but a man's color never bothered me. All in all, they were pretty ordinary. They had faces and feet and all the usual things. Their noses looked like cauliflowers, but I've seen boxers with worse.

What really ticked us off was the way they ignored us. It was as if we were below notice for them. We could have taken anything but that. It really got under my skin. I guess it did for a lot of people.

They only talked to us when they felt like it, which wasn't very often. And when they did, it was real condescending. It reminded me of that scene where Bette Davis dismisses the maid, things like that. They even snubbed the President. He didn't like that very much. Official delegations kept asking the aliens why they'd come to Earth and what their future plans might be. The aliens were not impressed by official delega-



tions. They didn't answer many questions. They came from someplace else and now they were here. That's about it.

As for me, I kept tearing the tickets. We quit showing sci-fi movies because no one came to them. I guess everyone was pretty sick of monsters from outer space. I didn't really mind them, though. Some of the nuts that come in here are a lot worse.

We have one alien that wanders through town and he gets me a little upset once in a while, but so do panhandlers and politicians. I'm an easy-going guy. Nothing much bothers me except when the popcorn machine breaks.

Our local alien had already sat through two showings of *Casablanca* when he came out to sit in the lobby. The feature had started and I didn't have much to do so I sat down next to him and lit a cigarette.

"Nice movie, huh?" I asked him. I must have seen it a million times. I love the ending with all that fog and the music is great.

"I don't see what there is about movies that gets you humans so worked up. It's just a lot of flat people on a screen."

He can insult a lot of things, but *Casablanca* is special.

"This is one of the best," I said. "Did you know they almost had Ronald Reagan instead of Humphrey Bogart?" I thought this would impress him. Ronald Reagan had once been a President. Humphrey Bogart would have made a better one, though. I can't imagine anyone messing with Bogart.

"One flat person is pretty much like another flat person," he said. He looked bored.

"That's not true," I said. "Bogart gives the movie depth. He can do more with an eyebrow than most people can do with ten pages of dialog."

He sighed. The aliens had picked up a lot of Earth gestures, probably from all those movies and TV.

"Back home the nearest thing we have to a movie is a box you plug yourself into. Everything is real. If the hero gets hurt, you get hurt. If he dies, you die. These movies you have are pale imitations of life. Unfortunately, they're typical of your culture."

"Come on now," I said. "*Casablanca* is a classic."

"It's trash. All your movies are trash. Your television is worse and your books aren't much better. Your music is simplistic and your technology is childish. The only halfway interesting thing about your society is football and even that stinks."

Insulting the Dallas Cowboys and *Casablanca* all at once was going too far. I got mad.

"If all this is so boring, why do you keep coming back? You sat through *The Sound of Music* ten times last week."

"And I was bored every minute of it."

"Then why do it?"

"I was just killing time. I have to do something until they come."

"Until *who* comes?" I couldn't imagine anything that would make me sit through *The Sound of Music* ten times. I hoped they weren't waiting for more of their buddies. We had enough of the smug aliens around already. They were giving the world a massive inferiority complex.

"You won't like them," he said. "You won't like them at all."

"Who?"

"They're not like us. I think you'll find us to be humble and mellow folk compared to them."

"Are they from another planet?" I asked.

"No. They come from the same planet we do."

"I don't get it."

"Look at it this way," he said. "When you first went into space, did you send humans up?"

"Of course not," I said. "We sent dogs and monkeys up first. Inferior species, things like that."

"Precisely," he said and his mouth drew back in a hideous grin that sent chills up and down my spine.

Just then the feature let out and I was busy for a while. He left between shows and I haven't seen him since.

I still can't figure out what he meant, but I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. Tomorrow we start showing *Bedtime for Bonzo*.

I just love movies with monkeys in them.



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# THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT<sup>α</sup>

by Grendel Briarton

art: Tim Kirk



*Mr. Briarton tells us that Feghoot first manifested himself during the course of a scrabble game, when the letters EFGHOOT appeared. The rest is perhaps too well known by now.*

The greatest years in the reign of Haroun al-Rashid were those when Ferdinand Feghoot was his Grand Vizier, and the Caliph blundered only when he refused to take Feghoot's advice.

Once Sindbad the Sailor returned from far AEthopia with news of a wonderful beast.

"It is like a fine horse of Araby," proclaimed the Caliph, "silver coated, golden maned. But that isn't all — from its brow grows a horn of true ivory! I am sending Scheherazade's favorite slave, cunning old Farouk, to capture one for me."

"I know of these creatures, Your Magnificence," Feghoot replied. "But *Farouk*? Surely not. Only a virgin can tame one."

"Tame one?" laughed the Caliph. "I have no wish to *tame* them. They shall be bred in captivity. All Farouk has to do is to catch it."

After three long years, Farouk and Sindbad returned, and with them, ramping and snorting in its cage, was their quarry.

"I told you so, Feghoot!" Haroun crowed. "Look at — "

He broke off. "What have you *done*, wretched Farouk?" he roared. "This miserable beast has been *gelded*!" Raging, he drew his jeweled scimitar from its scabbard.

Feghoot intervened bravely. "Stay your hand, Protector of the Poor!" he cried out. "What do you expect? Old Farouk was a harem employee. Of course he brought you a eunuchorn!"



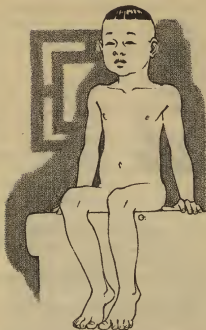
# TANSU

by Hammura Ryo

translated by Hitomi Shimizu & Joel Dames and

Stephen & Grania Davis

art: George Barr



*The author has worked at the wide variety of professions typical of authors: from manual laborer to proprietor of a rather risqué bar & hotel. His literary output is tremendous — both mainstream and SF — and his books and films are very popular in Japan. He is best known for rewriting Japanese history, introducing some very strange episodes there. He is one of the big three of Japanese science fiction, along with Sakyo Komatsu and Shin-ichi Hoshi.*

*Hitomi Dames, the primary translator, lives near Tokyo with husband Joel and her daughter, where Joel and Hitomi teach English. Stephen & Grania Davis live in San Rafael, California.*

"Well now, my oldest son is an unsociable son man," said the old woman in her rough country dialect, "so even if he's invited to gatherings like this he keeps quiet. But that doesn't mean he don't like you, so please don't mind him.

You see, his brothers all left — went into the Self-Defense Force. Noto here might sound like a pretty nice place because lots of tourists come visiting from Tokyo or Osaka, but we can't get nothing. Noto is near the sea, and we throw out our nets in spots. But catching fish is a gamble. When summer comes, we can't catch many fish.

"I reckon in the old days, every house around here had them sliding, painted *fusama* closet doors and heavy lacquered and carved woodwork. They took plenty time to build. They seem pretty strange to folks from Shichosaburo's. It's dark at night in these houses, even if you light the lamps. There's too many rooms, and unless we have something like a big funeral gathering, there's rooms we don't use for months. So I suppose it's natural if you're scared to sleep by yourself.

"If you can't get to sleep, I can tell you something kind of strange," continued the old woman in her soft rural drawl. "Well, I'm sorry I'm not a good story-teller like a priest, who can drone on until you're sound asleep. I'm just an old woman and I only know some old stories — but this one is pretty strange.

"Truth is, this story happened right in this house. My granny told me about it, but I'm not sure when it happened. Sometime in the past, when the head of this house was a fisherman called Ichisuke.

"When Ichisuke was in his prime working years, his own father and mother were still healthy; and he had a wife and eight children, ranging from age sixteen to a three-year-old boy.

"In those days, and those days aren't so long past, everyone had plenty children. I don't know what they do nowadays. Not so many kids — instead they live with their TV and refrigerator.

"But I reckon it's better nowadays, much better. The kids had them boils or runny eyes in the old days. And the old folks' backs were soon bent. Ichisuke's parents were probably bent over when they grew old.

"Ichisuke went to the beach early every morning and sailed offshore on his boat. I suppose working the paddy fields and farm was his wife's job, and the old people and older children helped her. Hear tell they all lived happily together.

"But according to the story, one day the three-year-old started acting mighty strange. At night he didn't sleep at all. He got up onto a big old *tansu* chest every night, and just sat there like this till dawn.

"Now Ichisuke didn't know about it at first. When he finally found out, a long time had passed.

"I reckon he was pretty surprised, and went and yelled at his wife, 'Why do you let him behave so strange? I'll spank him if you don't keep

him in his bedroom from now on!"

"But his wife saw the boy sitting on the *tansu* again that night, and she didn't say nothing.

"Well Ichisuke was fuming mad. He pulled the boy off the *tansu* chest and hit him.

"Now you understand that the wife and kids were usually very docile and obeyed Ichisuke. But this here seemed different. Everyone ignored the problem and wouldn't talk to Ichisuke about it, even though he asked them again and again. They let the boy sit on the *tansu* because he wouldn't listen when they told him to stop.

"Well Ichisuke gave in. He figured his son would outgrow such childish behavior, and he left the boy alone.

"Some time after that, I'm not sure when, Ichisuke peeped into the children's bedroom, thinking it was about time that his boy stopped sitting on the *tansu* chest at night.

"Well I mentioned that there were eight children altogether. When he peeped into their rooms, five out of the eight were missing! He found them all in one room, on the same old *tansu* chest, just sitting quietly on their legs with their hands on their knees, exactly like the youngest son!

"He was astonished, as you can imagine. 'What's everyone doing up there?' he yelled.

"But I'm told they didn't seem to hear. They just sat there. He was scared and woke up the rest of the family and made them come into this room.

"It seemed everyone knew about it already. No one was surprised. They all went back to their bedrooms, annoyed that he woke them up over such a thing. Only Ichisuke didn't understand why the children sat on the *tansu*, and when this thing began. Everyone else seemed to know all about it.

"Ichisuke begged his wife, 'Why are they doing such a strange thing? Please, tell me if you know!'

"But I reckon his wife just smiled vaguely and gazed at him, pretending that she didn't understand.

"They say Ichisuke grew very worried. He figured they were sick, and thought it would be horrible if each child caught the disease. He was half right. They were fine physically, even though they spent all night just sitting on the *tansu* — but they were catching it, one after another, just as he feared.

"So then the other three children began to sit up there at night, and even his mother with the bent back — I don't know how she climbed up to such a high place.

"Well finally Ichisuke was scared to stay in the house. Everyone acted the same as usual during the day. But at night they all fell silent and became pale and stiff as dolls, as they sat like this on the old *tansu* chest.

"Hear tell he was so frightened he couldn't sleep — just like you are now, my friend.

"But I guess no one can manage without any sleep. One night when he finally dozed off, he heard a faint sound; *katan, katan, katan, katan* . . . he had heard that sound before.

" 'I wonder what's making that noise,' he muttered. It came closer as he strained his ears. *Katan, katan, katan, katan*. . . . The sound came closer and closer.

"Well he turned to his wife who usually slept next to him, wanting to wake her up. She wasn't there. He leaped out of bed, terrified. He ran towards the strange sound, his feet deliberately making heavy slapping sounds, *dota, dota*. . . .

"So then he saw that everyone, his mother and father, wife and children were all working together to bring another old *tansu* chest up the path from the beach, into the house.

"Now Ichisuke couldn't speak, and just watched them bringing it into this back room. The metal handle rings on the old *tansu* made the noise, *katan . . . katan*. . . .

"After a while everyone disappeared into the back room, and he couldn't hear those ring sounds anymore. It grew very quiet.

"Fearfully, Ichisuke peeped into the room.

"They say his father and mother, wife and eight children were all there, sitting on both *tansus* with their hands on their laps. They sat still and upright with their eyes wide open.

"I reckon after that night Ichisuke was the only one who slept in his bedroom at night.

"Well I don't know how many nights Ichisuke endured the situation in the house. Finally, one night I hear he got very drunk at his relatives' house, and he decided to escape — anywhere. He ran along the shoreline path with only them same old clothes he was wearing.

"I'm told after he ran away from home, he became a sailor on a big cargo ship. He didn't come back for several years, but he still sent money to his family. He was a faithful and loyal man.

"Well after some years, his ship happened to sail around to this shore for some reason or another. The boat dropped anchor at a little cape a short distance from here, and stayed there.

"Since this was Ichisuke's home, the place where he was born and raised, he felt very drawn to it. He yearned to go ashore. Though the night was far advanced, he couldn't stay below decks. He just stood leaning against the bow of the ship, staring into the darkness towards his house.

"Well then he heard the sound of a small row boat coming near his ship, and also the soft sound, *katan . . . katan . . . katan* . . . It was the sound of the *tansu*! Ichisuke stood there motionless.

"*katan . . . katan . . . katan*. . . .

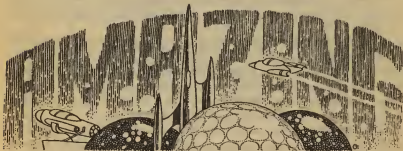
"So then the rowboat pulled up beneath him, and Ichisuke saw that his whole family was in the boat. They all looked up at him imploringly.

" ' Father, father,' they all called to him quietly, 'father, we want to welcome you home. Please come back. There's nothing to be afraid of. We brought your old *tansu* chest. Please sit on it while we row you back to shore. If you sit on the *tansu* tonight, you'll understand why we do it. Let's live together again. It'll be much nicer than the life of a sailor!' They all called and begged to Ichisuke.

"They say Ichisuke climbed down from the ship that night, and sat on the *tansu* while his family carried him home."

"I think it's a rather strange story, isn't it?" the old woman softly asked her sleepless guest. "I understand why they climbed up on the *tansus* and sat there at night, but I just can't explain it properly. I'm not trying to hide anything, I just can't express it in words.

"Actually, there are a lot of old *tansus* in this house by now. I think it's fortunate that you came to visit tonight. Why don't you try to climb up here and sit on the *tansu* yourself. Then maybe you'll understand." ☾



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*The author, a young Englishwoman, has recently completed a long sword-&-sorcery novel as a sequel to her novel The Storm Lord. Forthcoming from DAW books in 1982 and 1983 are two books of short stories: the first, Cyrion, relates the adventures of that magicianed hero; the second, Red as Blood, or Tales from The Sisters Grimm, is a collection of her reverse fairy tales, which are familiar folktales retold with a wicked and eerie twist.*

"She will have to go."

Claude Irving swam slowly upward until vision crested the surface of *The Times*. His wife very seldom spoke in this chill, clear little voice. He could, offhand, recall only one other occasion on which she had used it. That had been on the morning she had, standing beside him at the altar, declared, in that exact tone of an icy razor, "I do." It meant duty and utter determination. Conceivably, if thwarted, danger.

"Who, my love, will have to go?" inquired Claude Irving.

"The governess," said Chloe Irving. Her voice had not altered. "And the soon the better."

"But, my love, the children have accepted her. Let me stress that word *accept*. You know how difficult they can be. Fourteen governesses have galloped through this house in the past year — "

"Fifteen," corrected Chloe impassively.

"Well then. This one has lasted a whole month and shows no symptom of impending flight. The others were usually hysterical inside a day."

"I don't care," said Chloe. "She will have to go."

Claude Irving sighed, and laid down *The Times*, gently, like an old friend who has fainted. "May I ask why?"

Chloe lowered her eyes. Now her voice did alter.

"I'm not quite sure. But — I don't care for her. It's something — like a smell."

"A smell? She seemed most fastidious."

"No, no, I don't mean that she smells. But I have a reaction to her, as one does to a particular odour one simply can't stand — like white spirit, or geraniums."

"I like the odour of geraniums."

Chloe was her normal self now. She had flushed. She appealed to her husband with soft vague gestures.



"I told you, I can't explain. Perhaps it's instinct. She might — harm the children."

"Do you really think so?" Claude Irving asked with some eagerness.

That, of course, ended the discussion.

Later, on the train up to town, he found himself reviewing the conversation and presently those glimpses he had had of the governess.

She was young; and, though not at all pretty, she did have most definitely a curious sort of style. Indeed, to a man, there was something insidiously attractive in her slender, partly-slinking dark grace, the neatly pinned abundance of black tresses augmented by neat black clothing. She had small feet, come to think of it, and strange black eyes. Did they slant a fraction at the outer corner? Something oriental there, though her skin was flawlessly pale. No hint of a cosmetic. Nor, so far as he could remember, a hair or a sentiment out of place.

And yet, with all this quietude, she had kept the children in order. The awful episodes that had marked the coming and going of the other governesses had been absent from the term of Anna Medea. Yes, that was her name. Most odd.

Roger and Sibelle were really dreadful offspring. Claude sometimes wondered if they were the curse some arcane god had finally decided to vent on a placid well-ordered life. Precocious, canny and cunning, the beastly duet had squalled through infancy into an evil childhood. The servants were terrified of them, and visitors arriving for dinner would tend to glance about anxiously and say: "Children in bed, old man?" Not that the hour of bedtime actually guaranteed safety. Worms had been known to sprawl from a decanter, and treacle and dead mice to have been poured into umbrellas, even so late as midnight. The governesses themselves had suffered in like and more ghastly manner. One, a strict and elderly sadist, of whom Claude had had some hopes, waking to find her hair striped green and, for good measure, on fire, had run from the house screaming in her nightwear, never to be seen again. Although the packing up of her belongings for charity months after had provided some curious surprises, these were only temporary solace.

When Anna Medea arrived, in the driving dusk of an autumn evening, Claude had not thought she would fare any better than the rest.

But the first week went by, and then the second, and so the third; and peace persisted: the dreaded Ragnarok did not transpire. Claude began to relax. Even when he learned that in fact, Anna Medea had not come precisely in answer to the advertisement, but rather on hearsay acquired in the village, and that possibly her references were a touch more weightless than they had at first seemed, he did not baulk; and neither did he inform Chloe. His wife had a strange attitude toward the children. She liked them. He could only conclude they had in some way lied and misled her into this condition, or else that she had mesmerized herself into

believing them lovable. Claude, however, had often day-dreamed of such stories as *Babes in the Woods*, or *Hansel and Gretel*, suitably personalised and with tragic endings. Between himself and Roger and Sibelle there existed a rather flawed, armed truce. He was, for the duration, master of the house. They knew better than to practice directly upon him. But he had wondered now and then how long they would brook this state of affairs when once they were older.

With the advent of the new governess, all such macabre musings had begun to drift away. Recently, he had even dared predict life might settle to the placid pond of the first year of marriage.

And now Chloe had taken against the governess.

Could it be jealousy?

He decided to consider this idea on the train down in the evening. He reminded himself that Anna Medea was, after all, exquisitely young. He realized that she had, besides, cast some spell on the children; and maybe their mother was envious of that.

Claude Irving resolved mildly to interrogate the governess that night before dinner.

The planned interview, as it turned out, was the second of the evening. He had scarcely been back in the house an hour, and was standing at the drawing room windows with a glass of tolerable Amontillado, admiring the last light and the last economical auburn traces on the autumn trees, when the gamekeeper appeared in the window and shook before his eyes a very dead and bloody piece of fur. Claude opened the window.

"What is it?"

"I should think you can see what un is, sir."

"A rabbit with its throat torn out."

"Found it this morning, at the edge of the woods."

Claude visualised the gamekeeper plodding about all day with the mutilated rabbit, waiting for this moment of confrontation. The gamekeeper, a relic of Claude's father's interest in killing things, did not get on with present regime, which allowed the Irvings' sportsman friends to spill across the coverts with blazing guns at very irregular intervals, Claude lagging guiltily to the rear, white-handed.

The rabbit was shaken again.

"I didn't do it," said Claude, taking refuge in facetiousness, which was useless.

"Fox didn't do it neither," said the game-keeper. "Look at these here marks." Claude obliged and became aware he might not want his dinner. "Something big to this un. Slaughtered it, drunk some of the blood, and left the meat. Not hungry, d'you see. If you was to ask me," said the game-keeper, "a dog did this."

"Oh, dear," said Claude.

"It's happened before," said the game-keeper resentfully, "and I've told you before. Three or four times, now in the last month. And Bilkers" — Bilkers was the assistant — "he said he seen something a few nights ago, loping through your woods. Big black thing, like a great dog."

"He didn't shoot at it, I hope."

"No, sir, no more he did. But we'd be in our rights."

Claude sent the man off as soon as possible, and tried to relax with a second and then a third sherry. Things like this happened on country estates. Then some fool took a pot-shot, and you ended up with the corpse of your least amenable neighbour's favourite setter.

In the irritation of it, Claude forgot he had requested the presence of Anna Medea at seven o'clock, and when the light firm knock came on the door, he told her to enter, falling into a mood of vexation he had not intended.

"How are you getting on with Roger and Sibelle?" he snapped.

But the governess remained impervious. She stood before him, discreet and still, her pale hands folded meekly, her black eyes — they did indeed slant upwards — unblinking.

"Excellently, thank you."

"You don't find them," he barked, "difficult?"

"In my profession difficulties are not unheard of. They are there to be conquered."

"In fact their very difficulty may have enticed you here, since you sought this position *after* hearing a description of them." The governess stayed mute. "But are they learning anything?"

"Everything that is proper."

"I shall have to see," he said. "No one else has been able to teach them a single thing."

"Your children are most unusual, Mr. Irving," said Anna Medea. "But I am sanguine."

Claude Irving seemed to fall to Earth with a thud. He suddenly saw he was defensive and the governess was not. There she stood, lissome and frankly alluring in a foreign, almost an antique way — like something on a Greek vase — while he ranted.

"I don't think you know," he said rather apologetically now, "my wife may not have stressed it. The other governesses ran away. Most of them quite literally."

"It is necessary," said Anna Medea, "when treating with children, to understand they are not merely mutable but savages."

Claude was quite shocked. At the same time, he found himself in complete agreement. He could select no retort.

Anna Medea said, "Left in my care, they will acquire only the correct form of knowledge. Nor will they ever be a burden to you, or a source of distress. If that is all, and you are satisfied, I trust you will excuse me."

It was said with impeccable courtesy. Only when she had gone did it occur to him that he had been dismissed. Even then he did not brood on it. Instead he brooded on another, irrelevant, detail. It was growing dark in the room, and the gas was not yet lit. As she turned towards the door, Anna Medea's black, slanting eyes had seemed to give off a peculiar flash, like those of some wild beast caught by a lamp in a thicket.

That night, Claude Irving dreamed there was a wolf in his woods. It came out of the undergrowth, black and sleek and with eyes of fire, carrying little Sibelle neatly in its jaws. Although he was sure little Sibelle deserved it, Claude awoke in a dew of cold sweat.

The village clock was chiming three in the morning across the fields, and the air was crisp and brittle with frost. Something, however, impelled Claude to get up. Padding to the window, he gazed out. There were no lights in the house, not even at the windows of his wife's room, which often bloomed yellow with insomnia. There was, nevertheless, a full moon rising over the woods. In the light of this he presently saw a dark shape slipping from among the trees.

Despite himself, Claude experienced a wave of horror. He had an insane impulse to cover his eyes and not look. This infantile and primitive urge he furiously quelled. So he was able to watch the governess gliding over the lawn and around to the back of the house, presumably to let herself in at the servants' entrance.

Claude was not reassured by this spectacle.

In the morning he rose late, having stayed restless until dawn. Chloe herself appeared tired and wan. They squinted at each other hauntedly, each it seemed on the verge of mentioning a particular matter, and neither quite able to do so.

Since he was not going to town, Claude had, by midday, forced himself out for a stroll on the estate. The weather was cool rather than cold, the frost dissipated, and at the end of the north lawn, there was a sudden sighting of Anna Medea and the children, stalking beside the pond, perhaps on some form of impromptu nature walk. Shielded by a large beech tree, Claude paused to spy.

Fallen leaves lay thick on the water, which Roger poked with a long twig. Sibelle, holding the governess by the hand, chattered. They looked astonishingly normal, his atrocious children. They were not pulling faces, or the wings off small insects, not whispering evilly, not doing anything overtly nasty or even dubious. Of course, he was not close enough to hear what was being said. But the scene looked acceptable.

What bizarre occultism had Anna Medea bound them with? Was it terror of her person, or the promised revelation of some obscene science or philosophy dredged from the murks of time and all the sinks of Man's

primeval past — Claude caught himself with a jolt. What on earth was he thinking? He must be going mad.

He stamped off briskly through the leaf-flecked grass, and before he exactly knew it had arrived at the outskirts of the woods.

The woods, whose trees, unlike those about the house, still retained most of their flamey foliage, occupied almost two miles of ground. At its edges the growth was wide-spaced and slim, but there were parts further in which were dense and old, remnants, it was said, of a more ancient forest dating from before the Norman Conquest.

Claude was quite familiar with the woods. To ramble through them at all seasons was an entirely ordinary pleasure, never laced with overtones of sinister romance. Until today. Today, he found himself wary, trailing through the periphery, peering down the aisles to the red and ebony sequesterings of elder oaks and conifers. Images of popular fiction, druidic sacrifice and such like, did not spring to mind, but he sensed something repellent about the dreaming age within the woods, all the worse because it had always been there, unnoted. The ominous words of Bilkers floated on these thoughts. Was it *there* the assistant keeper had witnessed the 'big black thing' loping between the trees? Or *here* . . .

"G'morning, sir."

As soon as Claude returned to his skin, he reciprocated in kind. It struck him as ironic that Bilkers himself had stolen upon him exactly now.

"Seen any more of your wolf, Bilkers?"

Of course Bilkers had never claimed to see anything of the sort. Perhaps the remark would be taken as friendly sarcasm. Bilkers seemed inclined to take it as truth.

"Yes, like a wolf it were, sir. If I'd spotted un anywhere but here, I'd've had no doubts."

"Maybe some local zoo has lost one of its boarders. Lord Verbrace has a menagerie, I believe." When Bilkers received this information stonily, Claude felt pushed to ask, "Where in fact did you come across the thing?"

"Near the old pines. Had a toothache and couldn't sleep that night, so I went out to check the fences. About midnight it were, but the moon was up, nearly full. Suddenly, out slopes this devil. I don't mind saying, the look of it scared me for a minute. But it took no notice of me. There's a fox been through there recently. I don't think the beast could scent me through all that fox stink, or it might have come at me. I'd've had to shoot un then."

"It's probably harmless. A dog," said Claude feebly. He no longer believed this. Bilkers seemed not to believe it either.

They parted uneasily, like men going out upon a secret mission the world must never learn.

Claude could not deny that when Bilkers had mentioned the pines — certainly one of the most antiquated portions of the woods — the hair

had crinkled on his neck.

To feel compelled to march in that direction therefore disconcerted him.

A dank, abysmal shadow overlay the stand of pines. Even at noon it was gloomy. Aromas of rot and moss drifted. Birds did not nest in the vicinity, and seldom sang.

It was with a despondent unsurprise that Claude, having entered the enclosure, swiftly stumbled on a stone with a kind of gluey mess all over it. This looked only herbal, if uncivilised. There were also odd runnels cut in the damp earth. He did not like to tread on these or walk across them. Ashes and a charred stick gave evidence of burning.

Even to the layman, it was fairly obvious that witchcraft had been practiced in the area.

After luncheon, which he could not eat, Claude retired to the library. His father had been one of those who bought their books by the yard. But it seemed to Claude he had once come on a small collection of volumes dealing with the supernatural. It was an hour before he unearthed them.

Until the sky began to alter colour with the dusk, then, he sat reading. When he emerged he did so clad in a knowledge that was not cheering.

All through dinner, his mind was occupied with the predilections of sorcerers and shape-changers, their rites for summoning familiars, their practices upon babies, their more than platonic involvement with the full moon. Worst of all, perhaps, was the vile assurance that such monsters might pass as mortal, even live under one's roof for considerable periods, the bestial inclination quiescent, or, when active, so disguised with human daylight aspects as to go undetected. Werewolves had been known to live out long and respectable lives among their fellow men, only death by senile decay, or a stray shot finally revealing the Unthinkable to appalled relatives and lovers.

It had been all very well to wish the children some comfortable ill — immolation by a runaway carriage or a collapsing chandelier — but did even they deserve such a fate as this? For Claude had no doubt Anna Medea was winning their confidence as a prelude to devouring them alive. The tomes in the library had been crammed by such instances.

After dinner, Chloe began to play some skittish pieces of Greig on the piano. She seemed abstracted. Although she had not referred to her distrust of the governess again, it was obviously preying upon her mind.

Uppermost in his own awareness, however, was not a need for silver bullets or holy water. Claude, even now he believed, remained the Modern Man. He had determined on his course, which was to be that of sweet reason.

After all, the books had informed him that, once slain, the werebeast would revert to its human shape. A momentary vision of himself digging a



furtive grave for Anna Medea under the wailing pines did not appeal.

He knew at least she was not of the kind constrained to undergo metamorphosis immediately at sunset, but could effect the change at her own will. He had spoken to her after twilight. Only the flash of her eyes had given her away as someone gifted by dark magic.

Before seeking her, however, Claude tiptoed to gaze upon his son and daughter, something he had not been prompted to do in years. They lay asleep, snuffling faintly, innocuous; and Claude permitted himself a second's sentimentality. After all, they were his. Leaning nearer, astonished by emotion, he saw the night light flicker at each of their throats on a thin metal chain.

In another instant, uproar ensued.

His afternoon's reading had been most comprehensive.

Not until the children were shaken alert and with shrieks of malevolent outrage despoiled of the presents their governess had placed on their throats, not until Anna Medea was pursued to her private parlour and had the two herbal-scented pendants thrust under her small straight nose, did Claude feel justified in broaching the originally intended topic. Nor was he any longer prepared to be reasonable, let alone sweet.

"You are to be given notice," he announced, standing firmly at bay. "The terms are these. You will leave tomorrow morning. Any monetary recompense you think due, and which I consider sensible, will be sent to your next address."

Such a bribe had seemed wise. Actually, he was simply terrified. The need to get her out of the house with a show of strength was paramount. Not to incur too much malice was also important. She was, after all, high in the Satanic social order.

After the ultimatum there followed silence. Anna Medea poised before him, utterly composed, her cameo face a mask of ice.

"And this," she eventually said, "is because you object to the amulets I awarded your children."

"Unhygenic," said Claude. He did not say he knew they were forms of thaumaturgic thrall meant to bind the victims as surely as chains. He had not admitted at any time that he had fathomed her game. "Altogether, we don't find you suitable."

"Indeed."

"Your gypsyish mode of arrival. Your strange methods of tuition —"

"I must warn you," Anna Medea interrupted softly, "that these actions will bear you headlong into disaster."

Claude paled.

"Is that a threat?"

"If you wish. Send me away, and I cannot answer for the consequences."

Claude swallowed and squared his shoulders.

"Then I must warn you in turn. I am armed against you."

Anna Medea gave him a prolonged and terrible look, deeper and blacker than the vaults of time. Claude quailed, but would not budge. He held his position before the fire which still crackled from the pendants he had thrown in there.

Suddenly the woman shrugged.

"You are a fool, Mr. Irving," said Anna Medea.

Downstairs, he took a large brandy. His hands trembled so some was spilled on the rug.

That night his dreams, or the woods, were fraught with howling.

In the morning she was gone.

The succeeding days were not precisely halcyon. After the swiftest interval, free now of restraint, Roger and Sibelle again commenced the overthrow of the household. Dead shrews and abrupt encounters with live and energetic frogs became once more the norm. Close upon a local shopping expedition which the children accompanied, three emporiums sent word they would no longer be able to accommodate the Irvings. The children's mother laughed this off. But then, she was the only adult on the premises who seemed in good spirits. With the vanishment of the eldritch governess, Chloe had blossomed. Though Claude was glad of it, he himself had reservations. Something seemed to tell him the dramatics in Anna Medea's parlour had not comprised the final scene of the act. For one thing, she had since claimed no wages. As she was hardly a timid creature, one was led to assume therefore she did not reckon cash a proper sop to her annoyance. And what would be? The children, one felt, could no longer suffice. Her vengeance would be turned against her employers.

At first, Claude maintained a serene front. But as time crept on and the nights of the full moon started to close in again, his nerves suffered. To wake in a white sweat was a commonplace. To lie sleepless more common still. The journeys to and from town became nightmarish in a literal sense. More than once, having dropped into an exhausted stupor, he had woken himself — and the rest of the railway compartment — with wild cries. There was even an embarrassing incident with a fellow traveller in a wolfskin coat, which was best forgotten.

During this period, he was driven to visit a blacksmith half a day's drive beyond the village. The explanation for his requirements, which were two silver bullets, was so blandly eccentric that the man accepted it without a flicker of concern. On the other hand, werewolves might be more prevalent in Hampshire than one had supposed.

Three evenings later, Chloe said, "It's really too exasperating. I think one of the servants has stolen that little silver paper knife from the morning room."

Claude, who had been staring through the darkening window toward the east, blushed. Next moment he entered one of those small cases of logic, wherein he asked himself if he might not be taking a lot of nonsense too seriously.

"Perhaps," he therefore lightly said, "Anna Medea took the knife to spite us."

Chloe laughed. She came across the room and pressed his hand.

"How understanding you were of my silly prejudice. I almost feel guilty now that you made her go. And yet, I was rather frightened of her."

They stood at the window and presently the full moon rose. The oasis of logic faded in its frigid gleam so many centuries old.

Claude shuddered.

"And really," Chloe murmured, "I do believe the children have been much better behaved since she left."

Claude passed the night in a succession of scares, waking and sleeping, that anyone who had not experienced them would be hard put to envisage. Wolves leaped from the palmets and off the ottoman, or crawled down the chimney to emerge from the dead fire with burning eyes. Claude ran through forests and tumbled over precipices with fangs in his ankles. Anna Medea stood in the air, black and white as an etching, and said to him: "You are a fool, Mr. Irving."

In the morning, slumped wanly at the breakfast table, a message was brought him. An hour later he stood with Bilkers at the edge of the woods, regarding a collection of little bloody corpses and trying not to be sick. It seemed the shape-changer had returned and left her calling card.

"This un's no dog," said Bilkers. "I heard un last night. No dog ever made a noise like that. The hair near started out of my scalp. It's something not natural if you ask me. And it's got that bold, it's laughing at us."

Claude was on the verge of appealing for aid, but honour stopped him. He had not confided in Chloe. Bilkers was only an employee. Claude made some further comments on Lord Verbrace's menagerie of pumas and jackals, and hurried off to the library.

Here he spent most of the day, re-reading his instructions, wiping sweat from his brow, shivering, and loading and re-loading a newly-cleaned pistol with two bright lozenges.

The house was entirely black that night when he left it, blacker than the moonlit lawns beyond.

At the last, a desperate courage came upon him. Hearing no sound from the woods, he grew to think the monster awaited him. He strode forth, a knight to meet a dragon.

Not only was the darkness silent, nothing moved.

Reaching the brink of the trees, he hesitated, then plunged forward. It was, with the utmost loathing, for the aged pines that he headed. On the way, his own crashing might have obliterated many a stealthier noise, though once a bullet was almost wasted on an incautious owl.

Arriving at the stand of pines, a black clot where even the moon was lost, Claude was shaky but determined. A few minutes more, and he felt like a jilted duellist. The beast was nowhere to be found. A long anguished frozen wait then commenced, which took him through to one in the morning, as he heard it eerily tolled from the village.

Could it be the demon was not even abroad tonight, taunting him? Or was it somewhere nearby, watching, amused. At this notion Claude scrambled forward on numbed feet and pitched full length.

It was as he was lurching up again that a grisly howl split the air.

Claude's knees turned to suet, but he grasped the pistol and staggered in the direction from which the awesome noise had come. Fantasies about knights had vanished with the brandy which inspired them. This horror was from the primal beginning.

A quarter of a mile from the pines, he exploded into a clearing filmed by young beeches, beyond which he could see the pond and the north lawn of the house.

And there, between himself and home, was a low black shape, with two glitterings for eyes like two silver bullets.

Claude did not falter. The pistol was primed, the catch came off like butter; and, straightening his arm, he fired point blank: once, twice, into the hellish apparition before him.

It spun away and dropped prone. Nor did it move thereafter.

It was some little while before Claude could bring himself to examine his trophy. When he did go near he caught his breath, although he had anticipated nothing else, at the pale body of a woman flung where the wolf had gone down.

It was not until he knelt beside it, and the moonlight crossed into the beeches, that he began to think there had been some kind of practical joke, and then some sort of dire mistake. For the corpse in the grass was that of the wrong woman.

The court, as it turned out, failed to look with sympathy or understanding on the plaintiff's statement. That the husband of Chloe Irving had shot her under the misapprehension she was a wolf did not suggest grounds for leniency.

In the time that was left to him, Claude puzzled over the affair, maniacally desperate to make sense of it. Despite all he had read, it did not seem possible he could have been so permanently deceived. The only real clues he had ever had, he declared to his jailors, were his wife's insomniac nights. Of course, he had shrugged off the other clue, the gamekeeper's

complaints of murdered mammals, until they had coincided with the mysterious governess and her doings, and with Bilkers's sighting in the woods.

Bilkers himself was now saying nothing. His face, at the back of the courtroom, was melancholy but unencouraging. He knew when he was beaten. Claude knew it too. His only last-ditch effort was attempting to place, from the condemned cell, an advertisement requesting the appearance of an itinerant female exorcists of foreign extraction, possessed of hypnotic eyes, and answering to the name of Anna Medea. But either Anna Medea never succumbed to newspapers, or else her proud unbending soul took its vengeance for ignorant dismissal, after all, in silence.

So Claude Irving ended on the gallows, as Chloe Irving ended on receipt of her silver paper knife in somewhat remodelled form.

The notorious Wolf Murder was then gradually forgotten, which was a pity. Ten years later, without benefit of either parental or sorcerous check, and reverting to the maternal strain, Sibelle and Roger Irving began to terrorize the countryside. The carnage was subsequently blamed on Lord Verbrace's innocent jackals.



## dEvolution

reptile eyeframe  
instinct  
quarry track

lizard limbic  
swamp brain  
synapse snap

hunter blood cold  
mammal  
digit flex

deathstroke logic  
cortex  
Adam hand

— Tim Friel

# CINCINNATUS

by Joel Rosenberg

art: Stephen Fabian





The log cabin was drafty and cold; I moved a bit closer to the open fireplace, and took a deep draught from the stone tankard. It was real Earth coffee, black and rich.

The old man chuckled, as though over some private joke.

"What the hell is so funny?" I didn't bother to keep the irritation out of my voice. I'd travelled for over seven hundred hours to reach Thellonee and find Shimon Bar-El; and every time I'd try to bring up the reason I'd come from Metzada, the old bastard would just chuckle and change the subject, as though to tell me that we'd discuss business at his pleasure, not mine.

"You are what is so funny. Tetsuki. Nephew." Bar-El sat back in his chair, shaking his head. He set his mug down, and rubbed at his eyes with arthritis-swollen knuckles. It's kind of strange, that: I bear the first name of one of our Nipponese ancestors — Tetsuo Nakamura, my g'g'g'g'g' grandfather — but he has the epicanthic folds. Me, I look like a sabra.

"And why am I so funny? Uncle?" *You traitor.* There isn't a nastier word in the language than that. Metzada is dependent on credits earned offworld by the Metzadan Mercenary Corps, the MMC, and that depends on our reputation. There hadn't been any proof that Bar-El had taken a payoff on Oroga; if there had, he would have been hanged, not cashiered and exiled.

Although, the argument could be made that hanging would have been kinder — but, never mind that, the suspicion alone had been enough to strip him of rank and citizenship.

I would have given a lot if we didn't need him now.

"Well," he said, setting his mug down and rubbing at the knuckles of his right hand with the probably just-as-arthritic fingers of his left, "you've been here all day, and you haven't asked me if I really did take that payoff." He cocked his head to one side, his eyes going vague. "I can remember when that was of some importance to you, *Inspector-General*." The accent on *Inspector* was a dig. Unlike Bar-El, I've always been a staff officer; the only way I could get my stars was through the IG ranks — there simply aren't any other generals in the MMC that don't command fighting forces.

"I . . . don't really care. Not anymore." I had trouble getting the next words out. "Because we've come up with a way for you to earn your way back home."

He raised an eyebrow. "I doubt that. You've never understood me, Tetsuo Hanavi — but I can read you. Like a book. There's a contract that's come up, right?"

"Yes, and — "

"Shut up while I'm speaking. I want to show you how well I know you — it's a low-tech world, correct?"

I shrugged. "That's your specialty, isn't it?"



He smiled. "And why do I think I'm so smart? Let me tell you more about the contract. It's high pay, and tough, and it looks like there's no way to do whatever the locals are paying the MMC to do."

I nodded. "Right. And we're short of low-tech specializing general officers. Gevat is off on Schrifalt; Kinter and Cohen are bogged down on Orog; and my brother's still home, recovering from the Rand Campaign. So —"

Concern creased his face. "Ari's hurt?"

"Not too badly. He took a Jecty arrow in the liver. It's taking a while to regenerate, but he'll make it."

He nodded. "Good. He's a good man. Too good to be wasted on quelling the peon revolts." Bar-El snorted. "Did you know that Rand was settled by a bunch of idiots who wanted to get away from any kind of government?"

I didn't, actually. I'd just assumed that the feodacracy there had always been there. Ancient history bores me. "No — but we're getting off the subject." I spread my hands. "The point is, that you're the only one who's ever generaled a low-tech campaign who's available."

He pulled a tabstick out of a pocket, and puffed it to life. "If I'm available. What's in it for me?"

I tapped at my chest pocket. "I've got a Writ of Citizenship here. If you can salvage the situation, you can go home." I waved my hand around the room. "Unless you prefer this . . . squalor."

He sat silently for a moment, puffing at his tabstick. "You've got my commission in another pocket?"

"A temporary one, yes." I shook my head. "I'm not offering to have you permanently reinstated, *traitor*."

Shimon Bar-El smiled. "Good. At least you're being half honest. Who's the employer?"

"The lowlanders, on —"

"Indess. So, Rivka manipulated them into asking for me."

"*What do you mean?*" He was absolutely right, of course, but there was no way that he should have known that. The Premier had kept the negotiations secret; outside of the lowlanders' representatives, I was the only one who knew how Rivka Effron had suckered them into a payment-under-all-contingencies contract, with Bar-El in command.

He shrugged. "I know how her mind works, too. If anyone else were to fail — regardless of what the contract says — it'd be bad for Metzada's reputation. But, if they'd *asked* for Bar-El the Traitor, insisted on him — at least, that's the way the transcript would read — it'd be on their own heads. Right?"

He was exactly right. "Of course not." But my orders were specific; I wasn't to admit anything of the sort. Shimon Bar-El was a sneaky bastard — it was entirely possible that our conversation was being taped, despite

the poverty of the surroundings.

Bar-El drained the last of his coffee. "I'll believe what my own mind tells me, not words from a *staff officer*." He said that like a curse. "Of course, it's out of the question. I'm sorry that you had to come such a long way, but I'm happy here. No intention of leaving; not to be the sacrificial lamb." He set his tankard down. "I don't bleat any too well."

"You arrogant *bastard*." I stood. "Think you're unique, that I'll offer you a permanent commission if you'll take this one on." I picked up my bag. "Well, we're going to take this contract, anyway. The offer's just too good to pass up — I'll handle it myself, if I have to."

He spat. "Don't be silly. You don't have the experience. A lot of soldiers would die, just because — "

"Shut your mouth, traitor. You're wrong. Maybe I don't have any field experience, but *nobody* does, not against cavalry. And — "

"Cavalry? As in horses?"

"No, cavalry as in giant mice — of course it's horses."

He chewed on his lower lip. "I don't see the problem — you just set up your pikemen, let them impale their critters against your line. Take a bit of discipline, even for Metzadans, to hold the line, but — "

I sneered. "That's fine for a meeting engagement, where they have to come to you — but how about a siege? All they have to do is use their cavalry to harrass our flanks, and we can't ever get the towers up. And we've got to use towers: there's no deposits of sulfur available, so there's no way we can make gunpowder. Not with what the Thousand Worlds will let us bring in. Low-tech world, remember?"

"You've got the tech reports in your bag?"

"Of course I — "

"Let me see them." He held out a hand. "We're both going to have to study them."

"Both?" I didn't understand. Then again, I've never understood my uncle.

"Both." He smiled, not pleasantly. "Me, 'cause I'm taking this. And you, because you get to be my exec." As I handed him my bag, he took the blue tech report folder out, and started spreading papers around on the floor. "We're going to get you some field experience, we are." He studied the sheets silently for a few moments. "I'll want all the equipment special-ordered, make sure it gets through inspection. You got that, Colonel?"

"Colonel?"

"You just got demoted, nephew. I don't like to see stars on anybody's shoulders but mine." He picked up a topographical map. "Cavalry, eh?"

Fifteen hundred hours later, aboard the Gate complex circling Indess, I hadn't gotten used to the eagles on my shoulders. I guess it's kind of

petty — Hell, I *know* it is — but I put in seventeen years of service earning my IG's stars, and the demotion rankled. The trouble was, of course, that we needed Bar-El, and that meant that I had to put up with whatever indignities he cared to inflict. For the time being.

I shouldn't complain. Field soldiers risk their lives; all I had to do was put up with the sneering of a Thousand Worlds Commerce Department Inspector who clearly had no use for Metzadans or the Metzadan Mercenary Corps. And by myself; *General* Bar-El was with the men.

She dumped the contents of the backpack onto the flat black surface of her durlyn desk, the messkit, sheathknife, and various items of clothing falling in agonizing slowness.

"This doesn't look standard," she said, gathering it all into a pile, then picking up the sheathknife. "And I've seen the gear you killers carry before." Inspector Celia von du Mark tested the edge of the oversize blade with her thumb. "Molysteel?"

I shook my head. "No, just high-carbon — and no better than they could make, down there. The . . . General had everything special-ordered — that's an infighting weapon, called a Bowie." I held out my hand for it; she slapped the hilt into my palm. "The angle of the blade cants upward when you hold it *so*; at waist-height, it'll cut into your opponent's abdomen, makes it easy to —"

"Spare me the details," she snapped, tossing her head, sending her shortish black hair whipping around her thin face. "Just as long as you don't violate tech levels, I don't give a good Goddamn what toys you're carrying." Brow furrowed, she cocked her head to one side. "Of course this isn't a typical pack." There was no hint of a question in that, just disbelief.

I shrugged. "Check for yourself. We posted bond; we're not going to sacrifice that, not for the sake of having a rustproof knife or two." I slumped back into a chair. "But go ahead, have your men —"

"My people."

"— have your people check it out. Except for the bows, arrows, maps, and the siege-tower hardware, you won't find anything on any of the two thousand men in the regiment that doesn't duplicate what you've got in front of you." I spotted a piece of fur on the corner of her desk, and picked it up. There wasn't anything prepossessing about it; just a smooth brown swatch of soft fur, the size of my palm. "This is what it's all about?" I sighed. "Doesn't look all that special."

"Try dipping it in a weak acetic acid solution, let it dry." She sat down behind her desk, and rummaged around in a drawer. "Then it looks like this."

A twinkling shape flew toward me; I snatched it out of the air. Now *this* was nice: the swatch was white and shiny, gathering and shattering the light of the overhead glow, a spectrum of colors washing over its surface.

I'd never seen a piece of treated oal-fur before; it's strictly a luxury item, and Metzada is a poor world. Tidelocked to a small M3 star, we have to import trace elements, medicines, electronics parts. When we venture to the surface of our own planet, it's in well-insulated vacuum suits, not fur coats. There's only about five million of us; ten percent of our population is in the MMC. We Metzadans have to earn our foreign exchange by fighting as mercenaries. Luxury would be lowering the number of us who have to lose our lives earning offworld credits, not importing oal coats.

"What's this?" She held up a folded, triangular piece of fabric, opening it only partway.

"Called a shelter half. It's half a tent; you pitch two of those things face-to-face, and you've got room for two soldiers to sleep." I'd asked Bar-El why we were taking special-ordered shelter-halves instead of the usual minitents, and he'd pointed out another use for them. *You can wrap a corpse in one, and bury it deeply*, he'd said. *But don't tell the men. Might make them nervous.* And then he'd smiled. *And I've got one specially made for you.*

I fondled the piece of fur. It was nice, certainly, but hardly worth dying for. And, of course, nobody was going to die for fur. The lowlanders were paying us to try to chase the mountain people out of their walled village halfway up the slopes of Mount Cibo, right in the middle of oal-country, the only remaining area on the continent where the chipmunk-like creature hadn't been hunted to extinction.

Certainly, some of us would die. But not for the fur. For the credits that keep Metzada alive.

That sort of distinction used to be more important to me.

"And this?" She held up a round cylinder, flat and half the size of my head.

"That's a messkit. It seals air-tight; you can put food in it, just chuck it in a fire, pull it out with a stick. Then you use the point of your knife to flick that little lever open."

She smiled slyly. "I've got another use for it — you fill it full of water, bury it in a fire you've built next to a wall — say, of a village on the slopes of Cibo. And then you wait until it builds up enough internal pressure to blow apart. And, incidentally, shatter the wall." She tossed it to the floor. "Denied. The *messkits* stay aboard here, when your regiment takes the shuttle down."

I figured that a little bit of false outrage would go over well. "*Inspector, we —*"

"Enough of that. The Commerce Charter specifically provides that offplanet mercenary soldiers can be brought in. Less bloodshed that way, supposedly; it's better than letting the locals hack each other to ribbons. But there are limitations — *and dammit, while I'm in charge up here there are going to stay limits.*"

I wiped my hand across my forehead. "I know: not more than one mercenary for every four hundred locals, and no import of military — "

" — technology beyond what the locals possess. They don't have bombs like that. And you can't bring them in. Understood?"

Of course I understood. And I should have known better. Bar-El had said that they'd never let us get the messkits by.

We rode down on the first shuttle, along with the three battalion commanders, and their bodyguards. Which was standard — that goes back to the old Palmach days, long before there was the Metzadan Mercenary Corps, when no soldier ever set foot on a piece of land where an officer hadn't been first. There's nothing romantic about it, no bravura — just a matter of human economics: we've always had a lot of officer material, and traded off the high mortality among officers for lower casualties among line soldiers.

Other armies did — and still do — see it differently. Which is why we're better. And, to a large extent, why I get to wear my stars at home.

I followed Bar-El out into the daylight, squinting nervously in the bright sunlight. Indess orbits a F4 star, much brighter, whiter light than we use in Metzada's underground corridors.

"Relax," he said, dropping his pack to the dirt of the landing field. "We're on Thousand Worlds territory here, in the first place."

I watched Colonels Davis, Braunstein, and Orde walk down the ramp, their three bodyguards standing behind them, bows strung and arrows nocked, keeping careful watch on the one-story stone buildings that circled the field. They didn't look any too relaxed. "And in the second place?"

Bar-El shrugged. "I doubt that there's a Ciban within a hundred clicks." He turned around, and raised his voice. "Yonny, over here."

Davis trotted over, his blocky guard behind him. "What is it, Shimon?" Yonatan Davis was a short, wide man, whose girth and baldness always gave the impression that he was more suited to be a shopkeeper than an officer. I've known the type before; some compensate by being martinets. Davis went the opposite way, giving and taking orders with an informality that suggested that he was good enough not to have to put on airs.

"My . . ." Bar-El paused, " . . . executive officer and I are going to go talk to our employers, make sure that they got my message, have the staffs and spearheads ready." He pointed toward the north. "You're in charge until I get back; have your battalion bivouac there, the other two *there*, and *there*." He rubbed a finger across the break in his nose. "There won't be any problem here, but set out guards, just for practice."

Davis nodded. "Soon as they land. But speaking of practice," he bounced on the balls of his feet, experimenting, "we've got about nine-

tenths of a g here.”

“So?”

“So nobody has loosed an arrow under this grav, not recently. You want me to improvise targets, get some practicing done?”

“No.” Bar-El turned away.

“Wait one minute, General.” Davis reached for his arm, clearly thought better of it. “They have to get some practice — better here than in combat.”

Bar-El sighed. “They won’t need it. We’re not supposed to win this one.” He jerked a thumb at me. “Ask my exec, when we get back. And, in the meantime, just follow orders. Understood?”

Davis turned away, wordless. I trotted after Bar-El.

“And what the Hell was that for?” I kept my voice calm, with just a touch of a tremor, for effect.

He chuckled. “So that’s not supposed to be common knowledge, eh? We’re *supposed* to be able to storm a walled city — population about fifteen thousand, three thousand effectives — with two thousand men? While there’s horsemen harrassing our flanks?”

In fact we weren’t. And weren’t going to. “That’s what the contract says.”

He patted at his hip pocket. “I’ve got a copy of the contract. It’s handy, when you run out of bumwad — Tetsuki, I have no intention of just going through the motions. I’m supposed to fail. Damned if I’m going to play wargames, just to keep you happy.” He looked up at me, a smile quirking across his lips. “But I’ll do it to keep our *employers* happy.”

At the edge of the field, Bar-El stopped a blue-suited Commerce Department loader. “How do I go about finding Senhor Felize Regato?”

Regato’s mansion was clear evidence that damn little except military tech was on the Proscribed list for Indess. The floors looked to be real Italian marble; among the paintings I spotted a Picasso and a Bartolucci — and the glows overhead made me smile: their light was the same color of the glows at home.

A white-linen clad servitor led us into Regato’s study, a high-ceilinged room with enough space for a family of twelve, back home. The fur that covered the couch where we sat wasn’t oal — that would have been too easy — it was the pelt of some coal-black animal, glossy and soft.

After the requisite wait — Regato was a busy man, and clearly wanted us to know it — he sauntered in, a tall, slim man with a broad smile creasing his dark face. We stood.

“General Bar-El, it is a pleasure.” He clasped Bar-El’s hand with both of his own. “And this is your aide, Colonel . . . ?”

“Hanavi, Senhor — and technically I’m his executive officer, not his aide.”

He smiled vaguely, and dropped into an overstuffed chair, idly smoothing the legs of his suit. "General, I believe we share a hobby."

Bar-El didn't return Regato's smile. "I don't have hobbies."

I shot a glance at my uncle. This was playing along to keep the employer happy? Contradicting the First Senhor of the Assembly didn't quite seem to fit the bill.

Regato's brow furrowed. "Oh? I thought we were both devotees of ancient military history." He waved a hand at the bookshelves behind him. "I've studied from Thucydides to," he half-ducked his head, "Bar-El."

Bar-El chuckled. "Thank you — but Thucydides was a historian, as you know, not a soldier — and for me the history of my profession isn't a hobby, it's business."

Regato raised a finger. "Ah, but he was the first to recount battles, to preserve them for future generations. I only wish that he had been around later, when Cincinnatus was alive."

Bar-El cocked his head to one side. "He would have had to live an extra few hundred years. And been a Roman, instead of a Greek. Why Cincinnatus?"

Regato touched a button on the table at his elbow. "Coffee, please, three cups." He raised his head. "Because he reminds me of you. If I remember correctly," he smiled in self-deprecation, "he, too, was called out of retirement to command an apparently impossible campaign."

A shrug. "Different situation — Cincinnatus was honorably retired; I was booted out of the MMC and off of Metzada."

"That is hardly a relevant difference here; even were you capable of taking a bribe, the Cibans would have nothing to offer you. Hunting rights on the oal? You couldn't take advantage of that. Hard currency, the sort Metzada needs? They don't have any; most of the prime farmland on the continent and the only offworld trading center is down here in the valley."

A different servitor from the one who had showed us in arrived with a steaming silver pot of coffee on a tray with three cups and saucers, plus condiments. We all were silent until the servant deposited the tray and left.

Regato poured coffee for all of us, then sipped his own and sighed. "On to business. I received your message by courier, and your instructions were followed to the letter. At a warehouse near the port you will find precisely two thousand rulawood shafts for spears — each exactly three meters long, as requested — and spearheads for them, boxed separately." He lifted his head. "We could have attached them for you."

"I'd rather have my men do it themselves. And the rest?"

A nod. "Dried meat and vegetables, enough to feed two thousand for a month. If you need more spears, I can have the shafts and heads sent up to

you, if you'll give the convoy protection."

"I doubt we will — and if we do, Ciba is heavily forested, according to my maps. With rula."

I'd read the report on rulawood, and it sounded useful; similar to bamboo, but lighter and stronger. Strong enough that the Ciban villagers were confident enough of it to build the walls of their village out of rula.

"Good." Regato wrinkled his brow, as though he was about to ask why Bar-El wanted the spearshafts down here, if he knew that there would be plenty of rula where we were going. Or maybe I'm just projecting; that's what I wanted to ask. "So," he steepled his fingers together, "two questions: first, why didn't you ask to have horses ready? We could provide them, you know."

"I know — but my men aren't horsemen, and I have no intention of putting them on horses, up against a larger force, every man of whom has grown up on horseback." Bar-El shook his head. "We are professionals; riding horses, we'd be amateurs."

Regato nodded. "In that case, I understand why you wanted spears that you could use as pikes. Second question: how many ninjas do you have with you? I assume that you're going to use assassination." He gave a knowing smile.

Which explained why Regato had been willing to hire us, despite the odds. It wasn't just that he believed in Bar-El, or the mystique that's grown up around the MMC's successes. He had at least a suspicion, heard a rumor about the Metzadan ninjas.

Bar-El shook his head. "There aren't such things as ninjas. There haven't been for half a millenium."

He said that with a straight face; he might even have thought it true. Which it was, at least in one sense: Metzada's rumored assassins are only called ninjas by offworlders; we aren't descended from the Nipponese society that died out in the nineteenth century, Earthside. Not directly descended — but some of the members of the Bushido Brotherhood that were transported to Metzada along with the children of Israel had been trying to revive the ancient arts. It's been kept secret, the fact that we have a cadre of assassins within the MMC, but there's nothing you can do about rumors.

And an assassin can be a kind of handy person to have around; it can blow an opponent's organization apart, when the top general dies. Or, better, when he's kept alive, but all his top staff officers are killed.

Of course, an assassin has to have some sort of cover, that will let him mix with the troops, without even his own people knowing what his job is. Inspector-General is a nice one. You even get to wear your stars, on your off-hours.

Bar-El went on: "And it wouldn't do any good, even if we used assassins. Which we don't — I don't think a stranger could survive long



enough in Ciba village to first," he held up a finger, "find out who the top commander is; and second," another finger, "kill him." Bar-El shrugged. "If he could get over the walls in the first place." Bar-El turned to me. "Don't you agree, Colonel?"

He was precisely correct, as usual. Which was why I had no intention of killing anyone within the village. "Absolutely."

Regato spread his hands. "Then how are you going to do it? You're outmanned, in strange territory, and the enemy has greater mobility."

Bar-El sat silently for a moment. "Do you need access to the mountain?"

For a moment, Regato's polite veneer faded. "Of course we do — in more ways than one. We need the credits, so that we can bring in power technology. And we need to control the mountains, because the thousand-times -damned Commerce Department won't let reactors onto a world without a single government. There's almost a million of us here; we can't let a few thousand mountain . . . *yokels* stand in the way of progress. And — "

"Enough." Bar-El held up a hand. "I don't give a damn whether you're right or wrong, as long as you're paying the bills. My point is, that if you need what we can do badly enough, you don't need to know how we're going to do it." He sat back. "And I don't like to talk about battle plans, I never do. If you've studied my career, you should know that I never tell anyone anything they don't need to know." He jerked a thumb at me. "I haven't even told my exec how I'm going to do it."

No, he hadn't. Because I already knew what we were going to do. Lose.

There's an old saying, to the effect that a battle plan never survives contact with the enemy. Bar-El liked to hold forth on what nonsense that was, pointing to campaigns from Thermopylae through Sinai to Urmsku, where things went exactly as planned. For one side, at least.

"Besides," he'd say, giving the same pause each time, "the last line in the orders, in the plan, should always be the same, should always prevent the plan from becoming obsolete: If all else fails, improvise."

We improvised our way up the slopes of Ciba, the horsemen harassing us all the way. In one sense; it was a standoff: any time we stopped, pikemen in front, protecting the archers behind them, they couldn't do more than taunt us, from beyond the four-hundred-meter range of our bows. And whenever we started to move in the direction of the walled village, they'd sweep down on us, forcing us to form a line, pikemen in front, and so on.

Casualties were low on both sides — two weeks after leaving, we'd had three deaths and seventeen serious injuries — all stragglers who had let themselves range too far from the main body of our force.

And they had only lost a few dozen. Stragglers, too.

The trouble was, we were being pushed away from the village, higher up the shallow slopes of Ciba. I didn't like it much: all the mountaineers had to do was detach a body of their force, swing around and cut us off at the flat top of the mountain — an extinct volcano, technically.

"Don't bother me with technicalities, Colonel." Bar-El turned to whisper to a runner, who nodded and loped off toward where Braunstein's battalion was camped, at the far edge of the clearing. "I'm not in the mood to be quibbled with — and I don't give a damn whether this mound of dirt is a mountain, a volcano, or a pile of elephant dung."

We had climbed too far — at least in my opinion — three clicks away and about one below us, the walls of the village stood mockingly. The air was clear; I could see people and animals moving in the narrow streets, and a mass of horses and men, milling around the main gates.

Well, I'd stalled just about long enough. "Looks like they're sending out another detachment." The sun hung low in the sky, a white ball that was painful to look at. "Do you think they're preparing for an assault?"

He bit off a piece of jerky, washing it down with water from his canteen. "No, I think they're getting ready to invite us in for tea." He cocked his head to one side. "Seriously, they're probably going to take off tonight — cover of darkness, and all that — and try and swing around, come at us from the top tomorrow. Or just settle in there, have their bowmen dismounted and ready." The locals' only projectile weapons were crossbows. Easier to fire from horseback than our compound bows, but the rate of fire was pitiful — reloading a crossbow on horseback was probably not a whole lot easier than firing one from the pitching, yawing back of the animal. But from prepared positions, they could sit behind improvised barricades on solid ground.

As a matter of fact, it was possible — at least in theory — that one or more of them had already done that and were lying in ambush, somewhere near where we were.

A handy possibility, that.

Bar-El stood. "Come — take a walk with me."

The downslope edge of the clearing was just that: an edge. A hundred meters below, the sharp drop ended in a stand of the everpresent rula trees.

Bar-El gestured at the village below. "About how many would you say are in this next group?"

I shrugged. "A thousand or so. Probably a touch more." I glanced over my shoulder. Good: nobody else was in the immediate vicinity. It wasn't impossible that even Shimon Bar-El would slip over the edge of a cliff, and drag his exec along with him. At least, that's the way it would seem. There was a handy overhang, about fifty meters down. I could probably climb down and duck under before anyone could reach the edge,

then hide until dark. Living off the land wouldn't be a problem; that was part of my training.

And when Yonny Davis took command, not knowing what Bar-El had planned, he'd have no choice but to retreat. And quickly — before the villagers got their second force of horsemen around the mountain, and cut off the line of retreat. Over the mountain and down the other side — he'd make it to the port in the valley within a week, and they'd leave Indess behind.

The Premier had planned it well: we'd collect the credits due us under the contract, with minimal casualties. And not much damage to Metzadad's reputation — maybe other employers wouldn't be willing to sign a payment-under-all-contingencies contract, but so what? All-contingencies deals come along once in a lifetime; the loss of revenue wouldn't be much.

In a few weeks, when someone who looked only vaguely like Tetsuo Hanavi appeared at the lowland port and booked passage out, nobody would suspect a thing. The regiment would merely have retreated out of an impossible situation; Bar-El and his secret battleplans would have died together.

I turned. Bar-El was holding his Bowie. Casually, but if I lunged for him, he'd probably cut me by accident.

"What's that for?"

He smiled. "You any good with one of these things?"

I could have sliced him from crotch to throat in less time than it would take him to blink. But Bar-El getting knifed by his exec was not the image I wanted to leave behind — the retreat was supposed to look like the result of an enemy assassination, or an accident. Even — *particularly* to the line troops; what they didn't know, they couldn't tell. "Reasonable." I shrugged. "I may be just a — you should pardon the expression — staff officer, but I try to keep in shape."

He chuckled, backing away from the edge before sheathing the knife. "What I meant was: how good are you at cutting wood — the damn blade is too long to make a really good hand-to-hand weapon and too damn short to be a decent substitute for a sword."

The runner he'd dispatched to Braunstein ran over.

" 'Braunstein to Bar-El: What the hell are you doing, Shimon?' " The runner, a tall, skinny boy who looked to be about seventeen, shrugged an apology before continuing. " 'We're cutting wood, as per your directions, and have relayed said directions to Orde — but I'm damned if I understand. Would you be kind enough to enlighten me?' "

Bar-El nodded. "Good. Tell him: I'm starting a bonfire tonight, and I'm particular about the length of firewood. As soon as it's dark — say, another ninety minutes — leave your first company on watch, and get the hell up the trail to this clearing. Same thing for Orde: I don't want any skirmishers interrupting."

A fire might not be a bad idea; it could cover a retreat. I smiled at him. "So that was your idea — do you want me to go into the woods and cut my own contribution?"

He clapped a hand to my shoulder. "Not a bad idea — I think I'll join you." He flexed his hands. "I can use the exercise." He looked up at the runner, who was still standing there. "That's all. Run along." Bar-El turned to me. "Coming?"

I followed Bar-El into the woods. Good: he was taking us out of sight of the encampment. Perhaps it wouldn't be as neat a solution for him simply to disappear along with his exec, but it wouldn't take long for Davis to notice: and if a search didn't find his body or mine, attribute it to the opposition.

I let my hand slide to the hilt of my Bowie. *Just wait a moment, until he's stepping over the trunk of that tree.* He might be Bar-El the Traitor, but he was my uncle; I'd make it as painless as possible.

I drew my knife and —

— pain blossomed in the back of my head. I tried to lift the knife — *never mind what it is, finish him first* — but it grew heavier, and heavier, dragging me down. I let go of it — *bare hands, then* — but rough hands seized me from behind, dragging me back.

I gave up, and fell into the cool dark.

I woke to someone slapping me with a wet cloth.

"Go away."

"Easy, Tetsuo." Yonny Davis' voice was calm as always. "I hit you a bit harder than I should have, but," gentle fingers probed my scalp, sending hot rivulets of pain through my head, "I don't think you've got a concussion."

I opened my eyes slowly. It was dark — took me a moment to realize that the lights dancing in my eyes were stars overhead.

In the darkness, Bar-El chuckled. "It's probably my fault — I gave him a hefty dose of morphine, to keep him under. You sure he's going to live?"

Far away, there was a rustling, as though a ship's sails were flapping in the wind. Sails?

"Let's get him up." Hands grasped my arms, pulling me to my feet. It was hard to tell; but at the opposite end of the clearing, next to the ledge, it looked like the shelter halves were being — thrown off the edge?

"Better leave us now, Yonny — your battalion's next."

Davis nodded. "See you down there," he said, and jogged away. No, they weren't being thrown off — there was a man under each.

"They're called hang gliders, Tetsuki." Bar-El's voice came from behind me. "You take a specially designed piece of cloth — camouflaged as a shelter half, say — mount an alleged spear down the center of it as a sort

of beam, add other sticks at the edge and as bracing, and mount a lashed-together triangle as a steering mechanism." He chuckled. "Then you have each and every one of your men practice for a few hours, taking short flights across the clearing. And then you have it: instant airpower."

I turned. He was rubbing at his chin. "I doubt that one in ten will actually be able to control the silly things well enough to put it down inside the walls. But as long as a few do, to open the gates — and as long as the rest get close enough, before the locals arrive here in the morning —"

"You did it."

"You, nephew, have a keen eye for the obvious." He clapped a hand to my shoulder. "Of course I did it. Come morning, the few effectives remaining in the city will be captured or dead. And we'll have everyone else inside as hostages, for the good behavior of the twenty-five hundred who are up here, chasing shadows." He shrugged. "I think we'll be able to persuade them to move on; lots of other places to settle on this continent." He looked up at me, quizzically. "Do you think they could mount a siege, with us standing on *their* walls? Not that we'd kill the hostages, just keep a bunch up there, tied and visible — to cut down on their eagerness to take potshots."

"You intended this from the first."

He pursed his mouth, and spat. "Of *course* I did. The only question was whether or not we were going to be able to sneak the sails past the Commerce Department — when you came up with the messkit dodge, I figured it'd be a good distraction."

I rubbed at my temples, still woozy. "But the tech levels —"

"Don't be silly. There's not a damn thing they can do. Anybody here could have built one of these things, if they'd had a mind to. We didn't violate the regs — and the local Inspector passed us; she's not going to be eager to report that we snuck something by her. There's only one problem remaining, and that's where you come in."

"Me?"

"I don't know these folks any too well — somebody with a bit of clout might decide that the best thing to do is tough it out, try to starve us out." He shrugged. "It wouldn't make any sense, but — in any case, it would be kind of convenient if whoever's in charge were to get himself killed, if he's going to be stubborn. Maybe a crossbow bolt in the night? It's up to you." Bar-El smiled. "I didn't just bring you along for the exercise." He stooped, and picked up a knife and pack. "Better get going."

The last time I saw Shimon Bar-El was at the port. The regiment was being loaded on shuttles, preparatory to leaving. Officers are first down, last up — we had some time to chat.

"You did well, Tetsuki — they didn't need more than a day to decide."

It hadn't been hard — prowling around an open encampment in the

dark, stealing a crossbow, setting up a clamor in the opposite side of the camp. "No problem. General." He started to turn away. "Uncle?"

He turned back, startled. "Yes?"

"You knew from the beginning, didn't you?"

He smiled. "That this was a set-up? Of course; and give my compliments to the Premier. A nice idea," he nodded, "arranging an all-contingencies contract, where we — you — get paid whether we win or lose, and then working out how to lose cheaply, sacrificing only," he tapped himself on the chest with a nail-bitten finger, "an old irritation. I could just see you explaining it to Regato — 'Sorry, Senhor, but Bar-El was the only one who could possibly have generalised such a campaign — you knew that when you hired us.'" He spread his hands. "'And since the old traitor is dead, we had no choice but to retreat. Our contract calls for payment under all contingencies; do you pay us now, or do we have the Thousand Worlds Inspector garnishee all your offworld credits until you do?' — that was how it was supposed to go, no?"

"Roughly." I smiled. "But I think I'd have had a bit more tact. But why did you —"

"Stick my head in the buzzsaw? I could tell you that I knew that the hang glider gambit would work, even before I studied the Tech reports, but . . ."

I shook my head. "That wouldn't be true, would it?"

He shrugged slowly, his eyes becoming vague and unfocussed. "Regato told you about Cincinnatus, Tetsuo. About how he chose to come out of retirement, to command the armies of Rome in an almost impossible campaign. I . . . don't think he could have told you *why*. Or why, after winning, he denied the people's demand he become Emperor, went back into retirement, back to his farm. Regato couldn't have known. I do.

"Tetsuo, if you've spent your whole life preparing for one thing, learning how to do it well, then doing that is all that matters to you." He chuckled thinly. "I was a bad uncle, a horribly incompetent husband — and not a good Metzadan citizen. But I am a general; commanding an army is the only thing I can do right. I'm not claiming that it's the most noble occupation in the universe, but it's my profession, the only one I've got, the only thing I do well." His faint smile broadened. "And I wouldn't have missed it for *anything*." He clapped a hand to my shoulder. "Which is why we say goodbye here."

"What do you mean?" The officers' shuttle would be loading in a few minutes; both of us were supposed to be on it.

Shimon Bar-El shook his head. "You haven't been listening to me. Let's say I go back to Metzada with you. Do you think that Rivka Effron would let Bar-El the Traitor command again?"

"No." The Premier had been clear on that point; I wasn't even to offer that to Bar-El. Not on the grounds that we hadn't been willing to promise

him anything — dead men collect little — but because he never would have believed it. Metzada's reputation had been hurt badly by Bar-El's selling out on Oroga; the damage would be irreparable if we let him come home *and* return to permanent duty.

He nodded. "Correct. This was a special case. I'll be heading back to Thellonee — perhaps another special case will come up, someday." Bar-El sighed, deeply. "And you'll know where to find me." He turned away again, and started walking from the landing field.

"Uncle?"

"What is it?" He turned, clearly irritated.

"Did you take that payoff on Oroga?"

Shimon Bar-El smiled. "That would be telling."



*Joel Rosenberg is a member of Haven, a writing workshop based in New Haven, whose members include Kevin O'Donnell, Jr., and Mary Kittredge. Married, he lives in Willimantic, CT, a town with the rather improbable and inappropriate nickname of Romantic Willimantic.*

*The author has been known to claim that he writes quickly. It was a shock to discover notes on "Cincinnatus" dating back two years. Joel Rosenberg was born on 1 May 1954. He spent the next twenty-six years studying to be an SF writer, although he didn't know it at the time: he has been a bookkeeper, truck driver, encyclopedia salesman, cook and a mental retardation aide. He likes writing better. Much better.*

*Rosenberg is presently working on a novel, two novellas, four novelettes, and a scad of short stories. [Elephants come eight to the scad, according to Lee Hoffman; but she never told us how many short stories constituted a proper scad of them.] One is a prequel to "Cincinnatus." The novel, Ties of Blood and Silver, was supposed to be his first; but he got distracted and finished another one instead, so now it's his second. So far.*



*Avram Davidson's first appearance in this magazine was with an abridged version of his novel, The Phoenix and the Mirror, and his most recent was with "Hark! Was That the Squeal of an Angry Throat?" which, by a hideous typographical error (several editors ago, we hasten to add), came out as "Throat." But Mr. Davidson has forgiven us, kindly soul that he is.*





ADVENTURES IN UNHISTORY:  
WHAT GAVE ALL THOSE  
MAMMOTHS COLD FEET?

By Avram Davidson

Art: Jack Gaughan



From time to time to time, bones clearly recognized as those of elephants have been found in the North Temperate Zone. In western Europe the explanation always was, "These are the remains of the army-elephants of Hannibal the Carthaginian." Those who gave the explanation may not always have been satisfied with it, but the attribution continued to stand, as just about the only other possible explanation might have been, "P.T. Barnum didn't pay his feed bill." A little reflection on the part of any Latin student — which in those days meant any educated person — would have produced the memorable detail that the courageous Carthaginian had invaded Roman Europe with only nineteen or twenty heffalumps . . . and that the remains of hundreds had turned up. Perhaps they bred? Not that fast, they didn't: Hannibal's army grew old in the campaign, and so did his elephants. He was left with only one; we all know the splendid scene, how he rode it so close to Rome that he was able to cast his spear into the city gate. And then rode off into the sunset. *Never to return.*

However, there was no Clearing-House on European Fossil Elephant Information. Macy's did not always tell Gimbel's. In fact, and for long centuries, not all the remains were recognized as being those of elephants: and, for that matter, sometimes when they were, they weren't.

So to speak.

What do I mean?

I'm glad you asked that question.

Let us imagine a conversation, say six hundred years ago, somewhere in the Holy Roman Empire. Hugo says to Hans, "Someone tells me that the Bible tells that 'There were giants in the earth' in the olden days." Hans says (offering another sweetmeat to Greta). "*I could've told you that!*"

And so of course could have anyone else. In Europe or elsewhere. Belief in giants was universal, and existed in places where the Bible didn't and never had. Students of travellers' tales might propose the novel and interesting theory, which I have just now made up, that reports of the Watusi had spread far from their native habitats in Africa. Advocates of the pre-Viking discoveries of America may argue that early voyagers, provided with return tickets, had observed those Patagonian giants later seen by Magellan — and whom, oddly enough, no one, really, has ever seen since. There they *were*, capering and prancing on the very borders and beaches of the Austral Ocean, leaving footprints the size of sasquatch. And when later Spaniards came that way, trying to bring them the truths of religion, the gifts of Spanish government, and (also) any amount of red cloth and hawk-bells in return for any amount of gold — there they *weren't*. It is really very odd. God knows how many Spaniards starved to death trying to find the solution to the mystery . . . and, of course, and incidentally, trying to find the gold. The gold was not in fact found for

ages, and then it was found by the British, who discovered that the soil of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, there at the bottom of the Argentine and Chile, produced grass which in turn produced mutton, lamb, and wool for which other parts of the world would pay in silver and gold.

But that is another story . . . as is that of the Falkland Islands, 800 miles from Patagonia, which Magellan did not discover (British Captain Davis did) and which, if he had, he would have found quite empty of people of any size at all.

But, now, giants. I am sure that almost everybody has at least at one time seen at least one giant. I recall one who acted as a sort of barker for a Times Square movie theater, and who may have been about seven feet tall. During my boyhood in the 1930's the once-famous Robert Wadlow was still alive; he lived in a small town in Illinois and was over eight feet tall. There are scientific names for all this: gigantism and acromegaly, and we are informed that this is caused by misfunctions of the pituitary. I should not think that this refers to all giants, modern or historical: but certainly records exist, and a few of the Biblical references are rather detailed. My grandmother was quite fond of referring to Og, King of Bashan; I don't know why, it seemed to tickle her, somehow. We are told that he had an "iron bedstead . . . nine cubits long by four broad — i.e., 13 ft. 6 inches by 6 ft." But others say that the word here translated as bedstead actually means sarcophagus. The spoilsports, well, that's an awful lot of iron, anyway. Being the royal undertaker was no cinch. The bulls of Bashan were famous in the Bible; and maybe the kings had to be big, in order to bulldoze them . . . in fact I just now had the idea that maybe the kings of Bashan were selected for being the ancient equivalent of rodeo champions. It should create a furor in academic circles.

Goliath of Gath was in height, of course, six cubits and a span, or, nine feet and nine inches. *His* mistake was in not wearing a vizor on his helmet. But maybe the vizor hadn't been invented yet. And maybe it had. Who knows. Listen, the ancients knew a lot of things we don't know. I once mentioned the subject of history to someone. He lit up at once. "History!" he said. "I'm crazy about history! Say, did you know that in Atlantis they had nuclear power?" This question contained implications. I asked, perhaps unfairly, "How do you know?" His answer was brief. "Edgar Cayce!" he said. Well, when you are talking about history to someone whose idea of history includes what someone else saw in a dream, your conversational options are limited. So I said, "Far out!" And he was entirely satisfied. But, now, giants . . .

We haven't yet quoted Pliny the Elder in this Adventure, so let's do so right away. Pliny, writing in the 1st Christian Century, observed, "The tallest man that has been seen in our time was one Gabbaras by name, who was brought from Arabia by the Emperor Claudius; his height was nine feet and as many inches." In other words, just the same as Goliath.

Must have been something in the water. "In the reign of Augustus, there were two persons, Posio and Secundilla, by name, who were half a foot taller than he; their bodies have been preserved as objects of curiosity in the Museum of the Sallastian family." Wasn't that *nice* of the Sallastian family? Just the kind you'd want for neighbors. If you weren't especially tall.

Now we skip about 12 centuries and come to Sir John de Mandeville, a jolly, lying old rogue who may deserve an Adventure of his own: and who may yet get one. Only maybe not. *He* says, "[There] is a great yle, where be people as great as giaunts of xxviii fote long, and they have no clothing but beasts skins that hang on them, and they eate no bread, but flesh raw, and drink milke, and they have no houses, and they eat gladlyer fleshe of men, than other, and men saye to us that beyond that yle is an yle where are greater giaunts as 45 or 50 fote long, and some said 75 feet long but I saw them not, and amongst those giaunts are great shepe, and they beare great woole, these shepe have I seen many times."

Now observe this typical Mandevillean technique: he says that on one island there are giants 28 feet tall, but he does not say he saw them; next he says that "men saye" that there is another island where there are giants 45 to 75 feet long; and he says he did *not* see them; next he says that he saw their giant sheep many times. Beautiful!

Well, such tales as these, and there were many such tales as these, kept alive belief in giants, as did the occasional genuine giant seen or heard of. But there was another evidence of giants having lived in the past, and that was the fact that their bones sometimes were discovered. Huge leg-bones! Immense thigh-bones! Enormous neck-bones! People came and saw; they told the folks back home; the folks back home told the folks at the forks of the crick; and the folks at the forks of the crick told the folks who lived a good league thence, underneath the mountain. So the news spread, and so the belief was sustained. — Of course, eventually, the bones, it was felt, were taking up space, so they were often thrown out, or ground to make whatever ground bones are made for (Hmmm. Giants. Ground bones. Bread. Hmmm.), and no doubt sometimes they were burned — very dry bones will burn — and perhaps sometimes the pigs dragged them away.

But the memory lingered on.

Now and then, however, a gigantic *skull* was found. Skulls stuck around longer. My late and learned friend Willy Ley mentioned one such skull which was preserved in . . . drat. I can't remember the name of the town where the giant skull was preserved in the City Hall; let us call it, oh, Braunschweiger-on-der-Udder. For all I know it may still *be* there, staring blankly at you everytime you go to buy a dog license, or to complain about the drainage in the next street down, or to try to get a job for your brother-in-law, the dumb sonofabitch; *that* one . . . And maybe,

if you bring him along, and tell him to keep his hands out of his pockets and quit picking his nose, while waiting to see the burgomaster for whom you always vote (in hopes some substitute sewer-cleaners might be needed for anyway a *few* days — because, Jesus, does your dumb brother-in-law ever *eat*!) maybe if *he* sees the giant's skull, *he* might believe it — maybe you will even seize the opportunity to say, "See, Gunther, see what happens if you keep on picking your nose?" — but it is very very doubtful if anyone else will still believe the skull is that of a giant human.

Because about 200 years ago or more some spoilsport came along and said that it was an *elephant's* skull! Well, at first everybody held his belly while he laughed, because, after all, what would an *elephant* be doing in Braunschweiger-on-der-Udder? Then the pharmacist, as it may have been, that learned fellow who could read Latin, said, "*I* know! It must be one of Hannibal's elephants!" — Of course, it was a long time before anyone thought to ask what Hannibal was doing so damned far from Italy or the Alps. And by that time it had been realized that although the skull was indeed that of an elephant, it was that of a damned *odd* elephant, and not only not one of those obtaining in Africa or India in Hannibal's days; not one of those obtaining in India or Africa in more recent days, either. In fact, to drop the other buskin, it was that of an extinct species of elephant, and — though not really a fossil — was thousands of years old, which ought to be old enough to satisfy. Some people, of course, are never satisfied.

And all those other bones which had been turning up for centuries — enormous neck-bones, gigantic thigh-bones, immense leg-bones — and which had been taken for those of giants . . . had *all* of them been the skeletal elements of elephants? and had none of them been actually the skeletal elements of humanoid giants? The answers are respectively, probably . . . and probably not.

The folks back in the Holy Roman Empire did not know a whole heap about elephants. Recollect that when the King of Siam offered to send President Lincoln a herd of breeding elephants, Abe replied and thanked him and declined on the grounds that "Our territories do not extend to latitudes south enough to favor the multiplication of the elephant" — and neither did those of the Holy Roman Empire, \*sigh\*. However, even back then and there, the folks knew about ivory. Ivory was known all *over* Europe. And all over Asia. And, inasmuch as Russia is located in both Europe and Asia, it was known all over Russia. If, that is, you had the money, then you could comb your hair with an ivory comb. And if not, then you had better content yourself with a herring skeleton. And — hah! — a story!

Columbus brought back three parrots and gave them to the King of Spain. The King of Spain kept one and sent one to the Pope and one to the Czar of Russia . . . or, as he was known then, the Grand Duke of Muscovy.

The Grand Duke was a little bit leary of such a gorgeous bird, and, perhaps fearful just a bit that there might be something diabolical about it, gave it to his chaplain to keep the curse off it, so to speak. And the chaplain gave it to his deacon. Rank has its privileges; the robes of the chaplain were even more gorgeous than the deacon's; and if the parrot went *pop* because it didn't like *borsht*, why, in that case, should the chaplain get all the blame? Okay. And the deacon kept it in his sitting-room, where he practiced keeping his voice in tune for Divine Liturgy; and, as the phrase which the deacon chanted most frequently was *Hospodi pomilui* (*Kyrie eleison*, or, in other words, *Lord have mercy on us*), the parrot soon became familiar with these words.

And one day the window flew open and the parrot flew out and landed in the snow; just at this moment a peasant came walking by and, seeing the parrot, attempted to catch it. The parrot flew up into a tree and, frightened, squawked the only words it knew: *Hospodi pomilui!* — Lord have mercy on us! — And the peasant snatched off his cap and fell on his knees in the snow and said, "Forgive me! I thought that Your Reverence was a bird!"

Now the notion of a parrot in the snowy suburbs of Old Moscow is a bizarre one indeed, and so is the notion of elephants in the courtyards of Ivan the Terrible: it is true that the Byzantine caesar had his way lit at night by elephants holding torches and it is true that the niece of the last Byzantine caesar married into the ancestry of the czars-to-be of Russia: it has been conjectured that she brought her imperial style of cooking along with her (with, perhaps, sour cream eventually taking the place of yogurt), but there is no reason to conjecture that she brought any of her imperial uncle's elephants along with her . . . if, indeed, there were any left by then. In which case, we may well ask, for this is what we have been leading up to, *where did all the ivory come from?* which was appearing (in increasing quantities) in the marketplaces of Old Moscow? Holding Old Rome as the First Rome and Byzantium (or New Rome) as the Second Rome, the people of Old Russia — now the sole remaining Orthodox Christian country left unconquered by the Turks — held that Moscow and indeed "All the Russias" was the Third Rome. Adding, in an in fact so far quite accurate prophecy, "And a fourth there will never be . . ." The power of this, Third Rome, was challenged by no Hannibal: elephants crossed the Alps, but they did not cross the Urals. They dipped their trunks in the Tiber, but never in the Don.

Russia did not have a Far West; but it had the equivalent, by name Siberia. The Russian frontier was pushed eastward year by year by people who were perhaps not originally Russian but who had become Russified: Cossacks, they were called. They provided Russia with both troops and pioneers. Does trade follow the flag? Does the flag follow trade? The old-time Cossacks did not consider such problems; and, as long as the

supply of vodka held out, they did not propose to consider them, either. Year by year they pushed eastward over the forests and mountains and across the steppes, equivalent to our prairies. Eventually they came to the tundra, a vast, an immense territory including lands somewhat like the Canadian musket lands — these last a terrain which would be all boggy were it not that, a few feet below the surface, it remains permanently frozen: a condition which has given rise to the word *permafrost*. They took with them into Siberia, the Cosacks did, such items as metalwork—knives, axes, and so on — cloth, particularly of course *red* cloth — and the usual and inevitable trinkets.

Also booze.

Sound familiar?

The natives were in a number of ways like the American Indians, but with one major exception: having always lived in the Afro-Eurasian landmass, which the American Indians had not, they had developed at least as much resistance to the diseases thereof as had the other peoples thereof. Smallpox did not wipe them out, measles did not decimate them. They did stay where they were, being in fact infinitely less disturbed by the eastward advance of the Russians than they'd been by the westward advances of such eastern peoples as the Huns, Mongols, and Ta(r)tars. Of course, some of them *were*, in effect, Huns, and Mongols and Ta(r)tars, though not all of them. What did they trade for the goods the Cossacks brought? Well, like the American Indians, principally furs. Gold, too. (Remember gold?)

And sometimes, ivory.

It was of course realized, in a disinterested sort of way, that Siberian ivory did not always have the white look of so much of Indian and African ivory. Very often it was very brown. In short, as any fool in the ivory business could plainly see, most Siberian ivory was *old* ivory. Yes, but. Yes, but how came all that ivory into Siberia, which was certainly not elephant country, being for one thing too damndest bloody *cold*? No one had ever seen an elephant in Siberia. Obviously the ivory came from *dead* elephants . . . long, long, *long* ago dead elephants. Okay. But, if so, and certainly it *was* so, what had killed all those elephants there? This baffled certain western savants by and by, but it never baffled the Cossacks, who were Christians of sorts, and sometimes brought priests along with them —

What has killed off them elephants here in Siberia, Father Igor?

Drowned in the Flood of Noah, Grisha.

Oh.

Pass the vodka.

Richard Carrington, an English scholar and writer, says that by “the end of the nineteenth century an average of 50,000 pounds . . . of ivory was being sold at the annual market in Yakutsk, and it is estimated that

this involved exploiting the remains of between 180 and 200 [animals] a year. During the 300-year occupation of Siberia by the Russians, the tusks of at least 45,000 [animals] have been sold in the markets, and this does not include remains which were insufficiently well preserved to have commercial value."

Not only did the ivory move westward into Europe and southward into China, but certain elements of Siberian folklore moved along with it. The Chinese, for example, had long reported the existence in those barbarian lands of a beast called "the self-concealing mouse." Immense ivory tusks from *mice*? Okay, so they were giant mice. Hurts *you*? The Ta(r)tars somewhat disagreed. They said it was a giant mole. These big boogers lived underground and burrowed their way under the earth, just like other moles did and do, and now and then they found their way to the surface. Just like other moles. I know not what others may have seen, but I have never seen a living mole: they have always been dead, and I've assumed that dogs or cats killed them, once they imprudently shoved their funny-looking snouts above the surface. These critters which we are talking about were, however, far too big to have been killed by dogs or cats or any other creature known to live in Siberia; and so the Ta(r)tars and other tribes explained, to the very occasional inquisitive Russians who asked, that, being creatures of the dark dark underworld, sunlight was instantly fatal to them. And, no doubt, over many and many a beaker of vodka, the Ta(r)tars told the Russians that these big beasts were "dark brown in color . . . emitting a great stench . . . ."

Now, all this may have been good enough for that grisly old Tsar whom the Russians still fondly refer to as Y'van Grozni, Horrid John, whom we today commonly call Ivan the Terrible. (It was even, briefly, suggested that he should marry Queen Elizabeth, I mean *the* Queen Elizabeth, daughter of Hank the Eight: what a match *that* would have made!) But it was not good enough for his descendant, Peter the Great, the first Russian emperor with a genuine sense of science. And so, bit by bit, and year by year, his special emissaries began to piece together info about these big 'uns. It may not have been pure disinterested science; maybe more than one person in Russian suspected that the great burrowing mole had *something* to do with all that ivory: and ivory is money, right, Stepan Feodorovitch? Pass the vodka. First one imperial agent reported the find of a huge head in Siberia in the ivory fields: it stank to high heaven, just like the Ta(r)tars said, but its bones were still bloody. So it couldn't have been dead *too* long. And, by and by, in fact in 1724, not too long before George Washington was born, a Dr. Messerschmidt, one of the numerous German savants who went to Russia for employment and often settled there, reported the find of *another* huge head in Siberia. Dr. Messerschmidt tracked down the finder, a Russian soldier, who supplied details . . . and in fact more than just details. He supplied souvenirs.



The soldier, one Michael Wolochowicz, even made a written report—or, likelier, had someone write it for him. Russian soldiers were not in the old days noted for formal education, their terms of service were seldom for less than 25 years, and sometimes for life: and life on the rough frontier did not develop much delicacy. In fact, a somewhat later czar, informed of the nasty, *nasty* sexual habits of some of his faraway soldiers in the absence of women, is said to have said, “Well, let me know when the first one gets pregnant and I’ll give him a million rubles as a bonus . . .” However. What did Pvt. Michael Wolochowicz report?

“[I] found the head on the banks of the Indigirca River, which flows into the Arctic Ocean. . . I saw a piece of skin, putrefied, appearing out of the side of a sand-hill, which was pretty large, thickset, and brown, somewhat resembling goat’s hair. . . .”

The hunk of hide was sent back into European Russia; and, sure enough: it *was* covered with hair! Evidently the head must have had tusks, because it was universally taken to be that of a sort of elephant—and up out of all the universities of Europe a great sigh of relief was heaved: no longer need the learned worry as to how elephants, of all God’s creatures, could have lived in the frozen wastes of Siberia, of all God’s creation—elephants!, notoriously hairless, notoriously natives of the hot, hot tropics! Now the answer was clear: *these* elephants had *hair*! The last pro-Hannibal fan silently closed up his last pamphlet and went and hid in a corner. And the trade in northern ivory went on. And on. The Ta(r)tars, the world was told, called this hairy crittur something like *mammut*. Or *mammoth*. Nobody was (or is) quite clear what it meant, and evidently the word it came from has obsolesced and vanished out of native vocabularies before they could be written down. In short, like the creature itself, its name’s original meaning had disappeared.

Or *had* it? The creature, that is. From time to time the reports and the stories continued to come in: so and so, the son of such and such, a very respectable tribesman, my sister-in-law’s nephew, my brother’s brother-in-law or my brother-in-law’s brother, *he* saw one! It glared at him with its nasty weeny little eye and it raised its foot and moved its tusks. What? And then he run like hell, is what. — How much you pay for ivory this year, White Man?

And then the *real* find occurred, well, one of the first of the first real finds. And not from the Ta(r)tars, exactly, from a Tungu, a member of another Siberian and Mongol tribe. His Russian name was Ossip (or Joseph) Schumakoff. Ossip had seen a funny-looking hump of ground in the tunga of the Lena River delta. In fact, he saw it several years in a row. Eventually he came to look for it, and, it having been a hot summer—well, for Siberia, a hot summer—part of it had melted. And there was a tusk sticking out! Ossip ran like hell. Every Tungu knew that it was bad luck to touch a mammoth. But it exercised a fascination for him. Back he

came. Year after year. Still he did not touch it. More of the ice melted, enough to reveal a body attached to the tusk; and a great big body it was, too! Eventually, several years later, not having dropped dead in the meanwhile as all the Tungu medicine men had said he would, just for having looked at this creature up from hell, Ossip finally cut off both its tusks. And sold them. For fifty rubles. Times were hard. A man had to take risks.

Now, in 1806 the Czar appointed one Count Golovin as ambassador to China; and the count had invited a certain Mr. Adams, visiting Russia for botanical purposes, to come along. And when they reached the Lena River and heard of the find, what ho!, of course they had to go and take a look at it and see for themselves. Alas, encouraged by the fact that old Ossip not only hadn't dropped dead but had successfully made 50 rubles, the other Tungus had gone and cut the mammoth up and fed the meat to their dogs. The old time religion wasn't good enough for them anymore. However, most of its bones were still there, being far too big for the dogs to break; and so was lots of its hairy skin, chunks of which were sent to museums all over Europe, perhaps including Moscow, where, however, there is no evidence that Napoleon stopped to look.

Maybe he thought it would be bad luck.

Finds of other frozen mammoths continued throughout the 19th century. And they, in the early 20th century, one was reported from the remote region of the Berózovka River, in, of course, Siberia. A governmentally sponsored scientific expedition almost at once set out; despite all the speed that rubles could buy, it still took months — and yet the work could not be done too slowly lest the men be caught in the frozen Hell of a Siberian winter. The carcass was not quite complete. Wolves, perhaps, had eaten the trunk — that trunk which had trumpeted its useless appeal for help so many thousands of years ago. Much of the rest of it, however, was still there. As the huge body was carefully skinned, it bled, and fat oozed from it, and marrow from its bones, for some of its bones had been broken: the pelvis and one hind leg. Evidently the mammoth had fallen into a crevasse. One foreleg was still raised as though trying to climb out. It took ten men to move the skin alone.

The stomach and its contents were still intact; it was full, and it was, in fact, easy to see *what* it was full of.

It was full of buttercups.

More and more of the mystery of the mammoths was being revealed: all those reports that natives had seen them alive . . . remember? What they had really seen, likely, were individual mammoths frozen in huge slabs of ice. And the water slowly melting and running down the sides of such slabs had given wavering images of movement. No wonder they had thought the great beasts were still alive! No wonder they had run like

Hell! So, no matter how many tall tales, hunters' stories, and outright lies were told, still, the truth will out: the animals had been there all the time. All the time during and since the Pleistocene, that is. Which is time enough. . . .

But, the more time passed, the more certain questions seemed to be unanswerable, certain mysteries more mysterious than others. Why — to select but one — why were only *mammoths* found frozen solid? Why no other examples of the once-teeming fauna of the past? Why no direwolves, no giant elk, why no woolly rhino? and why no frozen cave lion, let us say, no huge aurochs, saber-tooth tiger, giant cave bear? and, to mention one special species . . . well, special to *us*, that is . . . why no frozen humans, of any sort at all? Except for a fairly few and not very well-investigated remnants in Alaska, all the mammoths frozen in the icy tundra were found within the realms of Asian Russia, and recently we have been able to learn the results of the researches of Russian Professor Nikolai Vereshchagin. A member of the faculty of the Leningrad Zoological Institute and chairman of the Committee for the Study of Mammoths of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Professor Vereshchagin has been studying the matter for decades, not within libraries or laboratories alone but out in the wild sweep of the tundra itself, up and down the oft-frozen rivers and again and again across that hideously uncomfortable terrain. A (naturally) highly-abridged but highly enlightening report on his conclusions was published in 1977 by the Smithsonian Institution; in it he has sketched several possible explanations for the mystery of the frozen mammoths:

- (1) They may have fallen down ice-shafts.
- (2) Cliff edges may have collapsed under them.
- (3) Isolated on islands by rising sea levels, they may have starved.
- (4) They could have fallen through ice on rivers and lakes.
- (5) Some were probably buried by landslides.
- (6) Changing river courses may have caught some.
- (7) Others could have been trapped by the fall of eroded lake shores.

Vereshchagin's colleagues, Boris Rusanov and Pyotr Lazarev, investigating another frozen find in 1972, found stomach and intestines intact. John Massey Stewart, writing in the *Smithsonian Magazine* for December, 1977, says of their report: "Seeds and grasses from the intestine indicate that the mammoth died in autumn. Indeed, only mammoths dying in autumn or winter were likely to be frozen and preserved, for those dying in the summer would decompose or be eaten." And to be sure the discovery of winter-type bark in the stomachs of others would seem to confirm this opinion.

*But what about those buttercups?*

It isn't every day that one gets to see what anything had had for din-din about 50,000 years ago. Obviously no one had fed the mammoths pea-

nuts; equally obviously they had neither hibernated nor fasted in the winter, although their blood-sugar might have been running pretty low. But if there was one item which stood out from all others discovered in the ice-block tummies, it was those damned buttercups. Well, how did it happen, then, at the time of Spring or Summer — this was the question constantly asked for almost seventy years — that these behemoths became frozen stiff in, it has been supposed, an instant? Well, to go into this we must, for a moment, go out of the austere halls of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Shall we?

Buttercups, now. I am tempted to say something like, "Science has long considered this problem," but from my college freshman days I recall reading an essay by Stuart Chase which included the memorable line (indeed, I quote from memory), "People tell you that 'science says' this and that, but science is not a man, and doesn't say anything." I shall revise, and write: "Scientists have long considered this problem." And so have people long considered this problem who were not scientists . . . at least not according to other scientists. One was Dr. Emmanuel Velikovsky. (*Duck!*)

Dr. Velikovsky, who died fairly recently at a good age, was one of those men who are so often found in the reading rooms of libraries perusing many an ancient volume of forgotten lore; day after day, year after year, often with their lunches in a brown paper bag: nuts, usually — the men, I mean, not the lunches — nuts and cranks, riding hobbyhorses and making interminable notes for books which will never be written and if written never published or if published (rarely) never read. I knew one once, charming old gentleman, whose apartment had become so filled with his researches that finally he was obliged to store stuff in his bathroom, since when he had never bathed . . . oh, he would wash his hands and face in the men's room, but if his collar or his cuffs slipped, it was plain where the grime began.

These men (some of them are women) and their interminable researches eventually die and their works are soon utterly forgotten. Of course there are exceptions. Karl Marx, for example ("Dr. Charles Marx," he signed out his books at the Reading Room of the British museum), was one. And Emmanuel Velikovsky was another. I don't mean to imply that he didn't wash or take baths. From all I hear (and believe me, I heard plenty . . . *plenty*) he was a very nice, very jolly old gentleman, more than one can say for old man Marx. In fact, I have heard exactly one, count them, one story to indicate that *he* even *had* a sense of humor. Someone in a coffee shop after a Marxist meeting got into conversation with a grizzle-bearded old fellow, who made some statement or other on economics. And the first chap said, "That is contrary to Marxist thought." At which the grizzle-bearded old fellow said, "I am not a Marxist. I am Marx." Ha ha.

But, now, Velikovsky. Velikovsky actually did write his books. And he even got them published. It was not easy. I regret to say that, should you meet some obvious paranoiac who tells you how organized scientists are conspiring to keep his books from being published, well, alas, he may be right! Velikovsky claimed that ancient legends backed up his many theories. His books bore titles like *Earth in Upheaval*, *Ages in Chaos*, *Worlds in Collision*. His theories were unorthodox, to say the least, and orthodox scientists were furious. And have remained so. Mention his name to any biologist or physicist or historian and watch the sparks fly. Eventually many powerful professional associations obliged Velikovsky's original publishers, Macmillan, to drop his books; threatening that, *Unless*, Macmillan would get no more patronage from *their* members. Macmillan dropped old Manny. Reluctantly. But, dropped. As for the actual, scientifically accurate content of his books, I am afraid that it is small. But, as regards the principle ascribed to the late Chairman Mao, "Let a hundred flowers bloom, and let a hundred schools of thought contend\*," well, Velikovsky's flowers were certainly not encouraged to bloom in the groves of academe.

A shame. Perhaps. But what has all this to do with mammoths, you ask? What's the matter, isn't a buttercup a flower? Well, Dr. V. claimed that, once upon a time, some other planet came wandering through our Solar System; eventually, of course, being captured, so to speak, by the gravitational attraction of the Sun; and forced to toe the line like all the other planets. You know how it is, let *one* planet do it, and all the other planets will want to do it, too. Dr. Velikovsky said it was Venus. I forget just why.

And, said he, all *sorts* of things, tremendously unusual things, happened while Venus was wobbling erratically around Out There. For one thing, it had come so near the Earth that its mass disturbed the earth to the extent that the poles shifted in an instant. One moment, everything was warm and sunny and the ground was full of buttercups; the next moment: *Ka-phumph!* The air went so cold that the mamms froze to death in a second . . . Well, that's *one* explanation. But the scientists aren't having any.

The volcanic theory was tentatively suggested by a few accepted-by-scientists scientists. As a result of a huge, an immense eruption, greater than Krakatoa, all the oxygen in a vast area — Siberia, for example — was burned out of the air. And rushing down from way up on high to fill in that vacuum which Nature is well-known to abhor, snobby old thing, came a rush of frozen stuff, and — Baby, it's *cold* outside!

The late Ivan Sanderson, a well-known naturalist and writer and very nice man who died too soon, suggested that (for reasons I cannot now

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\* It has been unkindly conjectured that the flowers were encouraged to bloom in the Chinese garden in order that they might be identified and destroyed. — AD.

recall but which satisfied the then-editors of the then-*Saturday Evening Post*) a sort of subcontinent-sized storm of refrigerator-type gasses came snaking along and down and zapped Siberia, and . . . *Brrrr!*

I have suggested that perhaps visitors from Outer Space with very long life-spans were cruising leisurely through the Galaxy and decided to pop an unspecified number of mammoths into deep-freeze for snacks the next time they came along this way, and they may be due to be coming back, real soon now, to see how we've made out since they gave us fire, and —What? Very *large* visitors from outer space with very long lifespans, yes, right. But this suggestion has failed to create a furor in academic circles. I haven't even been suppressed. Humpf.

Well, these are all indeed interesting theories; as to what truth lies behind any of them, if any, don't ask *me*. I just work here. But a few questions remain unanswered by any of them. For one thing, why have no carcasses of smaller animals been found, frozen like so many popsicles? H. Austin Miller Jr. points out that the smaller the mammal the more rapid its metabolism; result? The hotter it is. In effect. Therefore small animals might have perhaps partially rotted before they entirely froze. And I suggest, to even the equation, that perhaps the first touch of warmth finished decomposing them even before they could be discovered. Hence no frozen mice, rats, moles, shrews, etc. As for the "one whole wolverine skeleton with skin and hair still attached to its head and paws" and found near "the river Berelyakh, a tributary of the Indigirka," I scorn it. That is not what *I* consider a frozen body. Your wolverine is a very pushy creature.

It may be that few true mysteries are ever truly solved. The last passenger pigeon died within living memory, once the most-numerous warm-blooded creature (it has been said) alive: Audubon among others declared that its flights literally darkened the sky: not a single one is left: and we don't for sure know *why*, and seventy years of study have left us no wiser. But perhaps much of the mystery of the mammoth is of our own making. We have assumed that the mammoth lived in a climate or biosphere like that of the temperate zone. And it didn't, not at all. And, far from conditions in Siberia having greatly changed, they are largely the same. In short the mystery may be why it has been thought that there is a mystery.

The key word is *permafrost*.

Not Siberia alone but Alaska as well, in its northern parts, lies above the permafrost. In the spring the frozen soil thaws and in the summer it thaws a bit more. But only the surface really thaws, and sometimes there are holes and shafts and pits and cracks and crevices and crevasses and sumps and chasms where the snow remains throughout the year. I see these depths, caused by ancient erosions, as being firm enough for smaller animals to walk across. But the unwieldy and unwary mammoth was

another thing. Stepping upon a surface looking like any other surface, and finding that beneath a thin layer of dust or dirt lay a deep full of snow, too late finding itself to be sinking and unable to escape, the immense and immensely heavy creature plunged to its doom. Down it sank, sinking further for all its struggles, and down it stayed: preserved forever in the eternal frozen embrace of the permafrost until erosion or the hydraulic hose exposed it.

Therefore in answer to the question, "*How did it happen that all those mammoths were frozen solid with their stomachs full of fresh flowers?*" we have to reply that "*all*" those mammoths *weren't* frozen solid with their stomachs full of fresh flowers: only some of them. This does not dissipate the mystery; merely it diminishes it. And therefore in answer to the question, "*What had happened which changed the climate of Siberia in an instant from warm to cold?*" we have to reply that *nothing* "changed" it, that the climate of Siberia was cold then as it is cold now and yet has some warm weather now as it had then; rainier, yes; colder, no. A mammoth frozen as though in winter with its belly full of flowers as if in spring or summer is a paradox. One of the definitions of "paradox" is *a seeming contradiction*. The contradiction has now, I believe, been resolved. The mammoth was eating buttercups, warm-weather flowers, because on the top of the ground it was warm. The mammoth fell into a big hole into the permafrost at the bottom of which it was cold. Oh God, it was cold! Frozen earth or unmelted snow or ice or perhaps all three fell on top of the great beast. If it died of the fall, if from suffocation, if from the freezing cold alone, we perhaps cannot say. But the sudden change did not come from a catastrophe to the planet or to Siberia. The catastrophe happened to the mammoth alone. It had already happened to the buttercup. ❀



# LIFE PROBE

by Michael McCollum

art: Jack Gaughan

*Michael McCollum is 35, an engineer by profession, and a writer who has been appearing in the magazines for the past four years. Del Rey recently published his first novel, A Greater Infinity, and plans a two-book series based on this story, "Life Probe."*

*The author is married and the father of three children. He recently sold a short story which he wrote with his wife Catherine, who is now making her own bid to become an SF writer.*

I wake . . .

. . . in quick stages . . .

. . . of jumbled impressions . . .

. . . and stray memories.

The attack of integration vertigo lasts a dozen nanoseconds while my brain assembles itself back into a functioning whole. Finally the fuzziness is gone and I am once more awake and aware.

I 'look' around. As expected, I am in deep interstellar space. The stars are cold, hard points of radiance etched against the fathomless black of the cosmos. My chronometer informs me that I have been in flight for more than ten thousand revolutions of my creators' home planet about its star. It has been a long journey.

Jurul warned me that it might.

The thought of Jurul brings a sudden flood of long dormant memories to my main processing units. Jurul was my mentor and the Maker whose personality I carry imprinted on my circuits. It is his influence that allows me to look upon the stars and see beauty . . . or listen to the monotonous thrum of the pulsars and hear music.

And it was Jurul's voice that bade me goodbye just before launch:

"How are you doing, Nine-three-five?"

"A little nervous, Jurul."

"Not to worry. I have yet to see a Life Probe that was calm at this point in the countdown."

"Really?"

"Really. Remember what you're supposed to do?"

"How could I forget?"

"Humor us. Repeat your mission objectives."





I spooled up my Mission Objectives record and output it verbatim: "I am to seek out and observe intelligent lifeforms among the stars. If possible, I will learn all I am able of their scientific knowledge and obtain their help in returning home to report."

"And if you should happen to discover a civilization that has developed a means of traveling faster-than-light?"

"Not much chance of that," I said.

Jurul chuckled. "How did a computer energized so recently get to be so cynical? Answer the question, Nine-three-five."

"In the event that I observe any sentient being in possession of an FTL drive, I will direct such here to the home world to bargain for the secret if it seems safe to do so."

"Very good. How long to boost?"

"Coming up on eight-to-the-second-power seconds."

"Luck, Nine-three-five."

"Luck to you as well, Jurul."

I remained in communication with the Makers for nearly a full revolution following launch, but that was the last time Jurul's voice ever rode the laser beam. And shortly after reaching my cruising velocity, even that tenuous link with home was broken — and with it all hope of ever speaking to Jurul again.

For when I return to point of launch (if I return), Jurul will be ancient dust and it will fall to one of his descendants to take my report.

But to report, I must first return home and that is proving no easy task. I accepted the same gamble every Life Probe takes when it boosts into the unknown. It is a gamble five of six probes eventually lose. It is beginning to look as though I might become another grim statistic.

A Life Probe is the ultimate of the Makers' many creations. Powered by the complete conversion of matter to energy, we climb to nearly one-eighth light speed in less than a single revolution. But in doing so, we leave ourselves nearly crippled. For after attaining cruising velocity, we find ourselves with barely sufficient fuel reserves to slow our headlong rush at journey's end.

Thus, necessity has doomed me to spend most of my life in transit. I plod slowly outbound toward the galactic rim, with the eternity between stars my greatest danger. What intelligent being, organic *or* machine, could maintain its sanity on such a journey? My memory banks would overflow with data long before the first waypoint sun if nothing were done to protect me.

It is for this reason that the Makers created Caretaker and the Long Sleep.

Caretaker is my alter ego. His brain is my brain. Only the arrangement of our basic circuitry is different. Caretaker is an entity with no real sentience, a mere computer who comes awake only after I give the

command to switch all circuit modules to temporary data storage. It is his function to watch the sky, ever vigilant for that one stray bit of energy that betrays its creators as intelligent beings.

And when he finds one, he signals me awake. He has done so four times now.

That first time I was less than two hundred revolutions out, barely within my area of search, as excitement welled in me like a nova sun. I scanned the star in question, noting unmistakable signs of an advanced civilization. But a quick check of the star's position showed it to be outside my ability to maneuver. To attempt rendezvous would have drained my fuel stocks without halting my rush through the void.

That was my first great disappointment.

The next two contacts were no better. One was with a race on its way back to savagery, no longer able to repair the few machines that still operated. The other was sketchy and far outside my range.

I returned to the Long Sleep each time with a feeling of increasing disappointment resonating through my circuitry.

Now it is time to turn my attention to Contact Number Four.

I call up the signal from where Caretaker has stored it in memory. It is weak and splotchy and very nearly unreadable. I study the parameters of the contact with growing excitement: Amplitude modulated electromagnetic radiation . . . midcommunications band . . . a raster pattern of parallel lines . . . high and low intensities that form a two dimensional array when arranged in proper sequence . . .

Clearly Caretaker has intercepted someone's televid network!

Simultaneously with contact confirmation, I set two subroutines in motion within my logic units. One has the purpose of determining if rendezvous with the signal source is physically possible. The other is concerned with a far more difficult problem.

A yellow star leap towards me as I focus my telescope on the source of the signal. With mounting tension, I begin the delicate operation of plotting the star's position.

I am in luck.

A first approximation shows the yellow sun to be almost directly on my course. A few more hours of careful measurement confirm it. I will pass within a thousand stellar diameters of the star at closest approach — almost a glancing blow on the scale of the galaxy.

Now comes the difficult part. Before I can commit myself and my precious fuel to a rendezvous attempt, I will have to decide whether the creatures who originated the televid signals are civilized. And to a Life Probe, such things are defined by very narrow parameters.

A civilized species is one that possesses a knowledge of matter-antimatter reactions, a working grasp of the principles of mass conversion, and a large enough industrial base to support the massive recon-

struction efforts I will require. A sizeable spacefleet able to ferry a large work force into orbit is also helpful, but not absolutely necessary. Within my memory banks I carry complete plans for literally hundreds of different spacecraft designs.

I turn my detectors to high gain and focus my attention on the yellow sun. There is much to learn.

The star is closer now. Closer *and* brighter. I have detected two of the system's planets, gas giants to judge by the interference lobes they cast on the star's diffraction pattern. As the yellow sun's image has grown in intensity, so too have the intercepted televid signals.

It is a hopeful sign.

My data banks now contain hundreds of hours of televid signals and I avidly collect more. I wait patiently for the knowledge stored within me to build to critical mass, the point at which I can begin to learn the language.

My study has taken far longer than expected. The creatures do not appear to possess a single language. Rather, their signals arrive coded in dozens of different linguistic variations. The wide diversity suggests a planet of many competing cultures. That part of me dedicated to the collection of pure knowledge is ecstatic. The opportunity is unparalleled. Never before has a Life Probe chanced upon such an infant culture.

But the rest of me is worried.

For interesting or not, the creatures do not yet possess any of the attributes of civilization. My only hope is that they can be taught the skills they will need to assist in my overhaul. But can they *learn*? Do they have the intelligence, the ability, and the desire to absorb a thousand years of technological advancement overnight?

It is a question for which I have no answer.

I settle down to collect more data, and eventually I speak the language. Very quickly afterwards, however, I learn that the signals mean little more to me than they did before. That is hardly surprising. I know nothing of the background cultural referents used by the creatures in their everyday lives. In many ways, the gulf between us is as great as that between stars.

I ponder the problem for a few million nanoseconds and decide to approach it in a less direct manner.

I set up a surrogate mind.

The mechanics of such a division are relatively simple. I split off one of my logic modules and isolate it from the rest of my circuitry. The vertigo associated with the split is a dozen times worse than any I've ever experienced in waking. As the surrogate forms, I find myself growing more stupid by the instant. At the same time my thoughts develop a disturbing echo.

As Jurul drilled into me so very long ago, forming a surrogate mind is a

dangerous step. It affects my coordination, my speed of thought, even that tenuous quantity that goes to make up the self aware computing device which I think of as *I/me*. The detrimental effects of forming a subordinate mind are so great, in fact, that it is a move normally reserved for only the most dire of emergencies.

My current situation is desperate enough to make the gamble worthwhile.

My dilemma is clear. If I choose to decelerate as I close on the yellow sun, I will be irretrievably committed. Should the inhabitants prove intractable, I will end my quest with dry tanks, trapped in orbit about a planet of savages.

But my life span is not infinite, either. A constant rain of interstellar dust scours my leading edges as I hurtle through space. Even the minimal concentrations found in deep space will erode my shields if given long enough to work at it. Should I continue my journey, my shields will be gone before another ten thousand revolutions pass. And when that happens, the slowly destroying influence of cosmic radiation will be free to wreak havoc on my circuits. I will have nothing to look forward to but a slow, creeping insanity and eventual death.

And how am I to choose my fate? How can I get inside the minds of creatures with whom I have nothing in common, not even the mutual bond of being fellow organic beings?

I cannot.

That job will fall to the surrogate.

At the instant of birth, my step child is little more than a grouping of circuits from which I have wiped all knowledge. Nothing remains except a few billion silicon memory cells waiting to take on a new form. And a new form they shall have.

With luck, they will become a reflection of the essence of a human being . . . a *homo sapiens* . . . a man.

And when this new creature takes shape I will explore its mind. If what I find is positive for my purposes, I will use the last of my precious fuel to rendezvous with the human planet and enter into an agreement with its strange, biped inhabitants. For my part I will supply them with all the vast knowledge of the Makers. In that gift lies the potential to end their wars, feed their people, and increase their wealth beyond the limits of their imagining.

For their part, they will assist in my overhaul.

It is an equitable bargain. I only hope they will allow me the chance to offer it to them.

The yellow star has grown large enough to show a disk at maximum magnification as I move ever closer to my decision point — where I must decide to decelerate for rendezvous or not. I am troubled, perhaps more

so than at any other time in my quest. Every hour brings new data to feed Surrogate. And with each additional byte I find myself with greater doubts about the wisdom of ending my long journey among the creatures known as *men*.

Very quickly after I first encountered the televid signals I learned the humans' name for their planet and their convention for numbering the years. The planet is 'Urth' or 'Earth' in the predominant language of the signals, other things in other tongues. The humans number to the base ten, making it natural for them to divide their history into decades. Seeing that it is the proper tool for my study, I quickly adopted the system and rearranged my data to conform. I feed Surrogate in decade-sized packets, always stopping to observe the effect of each feeding before going on to the next.

I begin with the one-hundred-ninety-fifth decade, the span in which I first encountered the signals in space. I enter the data and test Surrogate's attitudes on subjects scientific and technological. I care little for the creatures' mating rituals, their problems in raising their offspring, or the catalog of injustices that makes up the bulk of my data. It is their interest in the stars and the atom which will decide their usefulness to me. I probe Surrogate for his knowledge of such things.

He has none.

I ruminate over my results. Surely the signals must have said *something*! I collate my data and scan for the references. Sure enough, an occasional mention of space travel floats out of memory every few microseconds. References to the atom are far more plentiful, although most deal with the fear that one rival group or another will start a war and blow everyone up.

I am puzzled. It is the same information Surrogate has. Yet he failed to assign powerful positive values to these very important facts. Rather, he merely noted them as background details, not overly important in the scheme of things.

It is more insight than logic that brings the answer to me. I scan the data hierarchy within Surrogate. As I suspect, since he has no idea of my purpose in creating him, he weighs the data as a human would. His file on space travel is barely more than a collection of inaccurate fictionalizations about alien monsters. Far more memory is filled with references to a silver furred goddess by the name of Marilyn Monroe.

Feeding Surrogate the same information to which the average human was exposed in the period 1950-1959 has produced a technical illiterate. Even the concern about a rival power group, the Russians, launching a planetary satellite late in the period could not overcome the inertia of that which went before.

I begin to get discouraged.

But a Life Probe is nothing if not persistent. I call up the one-hundred-

ninety-sixth decade and input it. Surrogate shows an immediate positive response. I read out references to something called the Space Race — the result of the Russian satellite — with growing excitement. Obviously I have misjudged the humans by not gathering sufficient data to form a true picture of their character.

The sight of their puny rockets belching fire and lifting ponderously toward the sky makes my entire journey seem worthwhile. Surrogate has suddenly been transformed from a technological illiterate to a lay expert. He has even developed a rudimentary knowledge of orbital mechanics. If he truly reflects the interests of humanity, I am headed for a planet populated chiefly by technicians and engineers.

The crowning glory comes when two spacesuited bipeds cavort on the surface of the Earth's single satellite. Considering the primitive state of their equipment, it is an accomplishment to equal anything the Makers ever attempted. I begin to develop a liking for these creatures. The Makers explore by proxy while humans brave the rigors of space themselves. There is something in my makeup that applauds such audacity.

It is with high hopes that I input the last full decade in memory, the one-hundred-and-ninety-seventh; and that little bit of the one-hundred-ninety-eighth that brings me abreast of real time. Such is my confidence in the final answer that I fail to notice the change in Surrogate immediately.

I begin the search program that will judge his reaction to the new data. As each test question is absorbed, I begin to note a pattern. Where before he was enthusiastic about all forms of technological progress, Surrogate has suddenly developed responses shaded with a subtle pessimism. At the end of the 1960s data Surrogate looked forward to a bright future.

But the 1970s-1980s data has wrought a dramatic change in his outlook. Where once the key word '*machine*' brought forth images of sleek ground vehicles moving at high speed over wide superhighways, the same stimulus now triggers the specter of clogged highways and a dense layer of opaque gas. Where '*nuclear energy*' elicited pictures of quiet power plants sitting in the green countryside, the response has turned to angry crowds waving signs while milling about half-constructed reactors. And most damning of all, '*space travel*', once the focus of a plethora of prideful images, no longer seems associated with any dominant image at all.

It is as though all knowledge of the moment when humans walked upon their satellite has been wiped from memory.

Confused and unsure, I begin to sort through the mass of impressions. After nearly an hour of correlation, a single scene remains dominant in my alien cultures subroutine. It is all that is left after everything else has been cancelled out. It is the essence of all that Surrogate has learned and the answer to my problem.

The picture is one of the most recent bits of data received. It features a

group of humans attempting to persuade their leaders of the wisdom of a particular course of action. They do this by the curious expedient of forming what is known as a 'picket line' outside the place of government.

It is a strange, incomprehensible scene:

A young biped female, gravid with child, carries two other children maternally close in her arms. Behind her is a placard attached to a small stick. It has been placed on the ground to free both her arms for her offspring. On the sign are printed several words in neat block script:

## PEOPLE PROGRAMS

### BEFORE

### SPACE PROGRAMS!

I rerun the frozen frame several times through my battery of sophisticated logic programs. Each looping inspection only serves to increase my confusion. There is a dichotomy expressed in the placard message that I fail to grasp. Surrogate believes he understands the reference and tries to explain it to me . . . but to no avail.

I ponder my problem. What does it mean and how does it affect me? I do not know for I am only a computer, no matter how like a sentient creature Jurul would have had me be.

I am only a computer and I do not know.

That is the worst of all possible universes.

The yellow sun is very large and bright now, large enough for the Earth-Moon system to show as an elongated teardrop of light. It hardly matters anymore since my attention is focused on another star, a red-orange dwarf sixty light-years beyond.

Forgotten are the humans and their queer mercurial attitudes. They were only a marginal choice at best and no choice at all after my astounding discovery. For I have discovered evidence of a true civilization, one that has succeeded where the Makers have failed.

A strong, strangely linear x-ray source centered on the red-orange sun can be nothing less than the wake of a ship traveling faster-than-light!

I suppress the excitement I feel at the discovery. Instead, I go immediately to work pinpointing the exact location of the x-ray source. As seen from my vantage point, it is only a few degrees of arc distant from the yellow sun of the humans. But those few degrees concern me greatly. The new target lies on the edge of my maneuvering reserves and I am fast approaching my deceleration window for Earth. Should a direct journey prove impossible, I will have to reconsider my decision to pass the humans by. For there is one way to arrive at the new star with plenty of



fuel to spare. I can stop among the humans, obtain their assistance, and then launch outbound on any vector I choose.

If it weren't for my doubts about their reliability as partners, I would prefer such a choice. A two stage journey presents the least risk of failure. And my discovery has given my mission new importance. No longer does failure mean just the loss of my accumulated data. It is now within my power to bring the ancient dream of the Makers to fruition. In a game of such high stakes, failure is unthinkable.

My triangulation subroutine finishes its job and the news is bad. The red-orange star is nearly three percent beyond my ability to change course.

I review my options in light of this new data. It appears that I have none. With only enough fuel left to decelerate and rendezvous with Earth, all other courses of action seem closed to me.

Yet the obvious solution does not feel right. I rethink my data. It is my distrust of the humans which worries me, of course. Their actions appear totally alien to me. How can I base a rational decision on data that make no sense? Logically, they need me as badly as I need them. My knowledge will catapult them a thousand years into the future. Thirty plus years of observation have taught me a great deal. For instance, I long ago learned that the culture which controls the televid signals represents only a few hundred million of the most advanced individuals on the planet. Unrepresented are another two billion, people who still starve for lack of food, die from curable diseases, and are killed in preventable wars. My knowledge will raise all of humanity to the heights, not just the lucky few who control the planet's limited resources.

How could anyone refuse such a gift of knowledge? Yet Surrogate is of the opinion that they might. And should they reject me, my mission will end in failure. The FTL civilization may remain forever ignorant of the Makers and their plight. Do I have the right to gamble so much on the good will of savages? Do I have any choice?

Suddenly I know there is another way. I consider my new option carefully. I do not like it. It seems as dangerous as being eternally trapped in orbit about the Earth.

For all the time I have studied human culture, I have also studied their yellow sun. As a result, I know it better than any other star in the galaxy. On my present course, I will pass very close to it in my transit of the solar system. I consider the effect of such a close approach on my path through space.

The Makers call it a gravity-well maneuver. By swinging close in and letting gravity and the solar wind have their way with me, my orbit will be deflected. A tiny course correction while still beyond the Solar System will enable me to shape this curving orbit to my own purposes. If properly computed and executed, I will find myself aimed directly for the star of

the FTL civilization following conjunction. In effect, I can use the yellow star to change course without wasting a drop of precious fuel.

But are the savings worth the risk?

I am a denizen of deepest interstellar space. In the soup that surrounds a star my shields would be destroyed in an instant. The best I could expect then would be to have most of my sensors burned out by the whipping gas. At worst I would be totally disintegrated.

Not exactly an optimum solution . . .

And what of the century-long journey across sixty light-years of space should I survive the storm? With so much damage I would be unable to return to the Long Sleep. I would have to be awake and alert during the entire journey. What stage of senility would I be in by the time I arrived?

I come to a conclusion. The risks of solar passage are too great. The Makers have waited a long time for the secret of FTL, they can wait a bit longer. Like it or not, humanity is going to find itself pulled out of its mud wallow and placed on the road to civilization. I will elevate the squabbling near-apes to unbounded prosperity whether they wish it or not.

I turn once more to Surrogate. Since my discovery of the FTL civilization, I have ignored him shamefully. Since I will need his help in understanding the humans, I update his memory banks concerning our situation and my decision to make contact.

Unbidden, Surrogate reminds me of the human female clutching her children to her breasts. I focus my attention once more on the strange sign lying on the ground beside her. I puzzle over the meaning of the message so carefully lettered on its face.

I hesitate as doubt once again floods my circuits.

I weigh all my data one last time.

I make my decision.

## INTER-AGENCY COMMUNICATION

TO: Dr. William Bagley, Presidential Science Advisor, The White House, Washington, D.C.

FROM: Joseph P. Rogers, NASA, SETI Program Director

Dear Bill,

Just a quick note to let you know what I've found here at Goldstone. The reports were essentially correct. At 20:12 hours GMT, 12 June 1986, the Big Ear was monitoring transmissions from the Mercury Orbiter spacecraft when suddenly all telemetry was knocked out by a powerful broadcast of unknown origin (a transcript of which is Attachment I hereto). You will note that the transmission was received uncoded and in American English.

Attachment II is a photograph taken by an automatic camera at Kitt

Peak Observatory at approximately the same time. Note the streak of light just above the upper left quadrant of the sun. The astronomers tell me that this is due to a material object moving at very high speed through the solar corona. The streak does not reappear after moving behind the sun. Whether this means the object burned up or is merely due to a bad viewing angle is unknown.

No signals were detected after the object passed behind the sun.

Official report to follow.

Joe.

P.S. I wonder if it made it?



## REPLY BY TIME WARP

We both inhabit strange dimensions.  
Here I've pursued dragons, looked  
for a forlorn prince to rescue.  
I've cut my yellow hair and left  
the gnomes behind. And where you are  
the perpendicular buildings thrust,  
or so I assume, even though the Dow-  
Jones is down. When we first made  
the connection, I was the scoffer,  
and you thought me fantastic. Now  
who's irrational? Do you think  
you could survive in my enchanted  
forest? Could I live on plastics?

But dragons are scarce, wind whispers  
in empty grottoes, falconry loses  
its charm. You would have stories  
to enthrall me nights on end  
in the great hall. And I might like  
to visit one of your singles bars.  
So let's try for Friday evening,  
under the next full moon —  
your space or mine!

— **Ellin Carter**

# AQUILA MEETS BIGFOOT

by Somtow Sucharitkul

art: Frank Kelly Freas





*The author is a Thai, raised and educated in various countries, and has been a successful science-fiction writer and avant-garde composer for several years. He is the author of Starship and Haiku, and Light on the Sound, this last just out from Timescape Books. The present story is a continuation of a series begun elsewhere. It may be described — loosely — as a comic alternate-history of the Roman conquest of North America. The series will be published as a book, The Aquiliad.*

*The philosophical controversy between Mr. Sucharitkul and Mr. Darrell Schweitzer, previously chronicled in these pages, was resolved recently; Mr. Schweitzer gave Mr. Sucharitkul the Meaning of Life when they met under a Bo tree in Philadelphia.*

*According to Mr. Sucharitkul, the word of the mouth is "spectacle"!*

I was staring into the face of Marcus Ulpius Trajanus, Caesar Augustus, Pater Patriae, Pater Maximus Candidusque, *etcetera etcetera*. He was sitting in a grand palanquin borne by burly Nubians; his demeanor, far from the languid decadence affected by previous Caesars, showed an earnestness that boded ill for me. The day before, so I'd heard, he'd already reduced G. Pomponius Piso the Younger, procurator of Iracuavia, to a quivering jelly in the course of a tirade on the necessity for parsimoniousness in the governance of our remote Provinces here on the Western shore of the Oceanus of Atlanticus; would he do less for me, Titus Papinianus, procurator of Lacotia, the vastest, most distant, most eccentric province of the Roman Empire?

I was tired after my long journey by paddleboat from the capital of Caesaria on the River Miserabilis; I was now in Alexandria, capital of Iracuavia, an eastern-shore city egregiously sultry in summer and unpleasantly chilly in winter, its glistening-new marble edifices looming from the clusters of Iracuavian huts in a bend of the River of Pluto Maximus.

"Found the place all right, eh, Papinian?" said Caesar. "Not too many brigands, I trust?"

I started to approach, but a eunuch stepped out and stopped me. "Ten

paces forward," he warbled, "genuflect three times, then kneel until he tells you to stand up."

"Oh, we can dispense with all that," said Trajan. "Oh, bother! The things We've had to do, General, to make sure these nasty plebeians realize that We are their god! Ceremonies, protocols . . . and these frightfully expensive eunuchs from Asia Minor! Come, tell me about your journey." His use of the newfangled royal *We* was intermittent, as if he couldn't quite make up his mind. "Roads all right, eh?"

"Yes, Caesar. Perfectly safe."

Well, what was I to do, tell him all about how we'd been beset by Comanxians and Apaxians all the way down the *Miserabilis*? It hadn't been too hard to polish off our assailants, who had in any case been roaming a little far from home; it *had* been good opportunity to get hold of some able-bodied slaves to use on the treadmill of the paddleboat.

Once east, in the Iracuavian territory, we found the Pax Romana in full force in Pomponius Piso's province. My group — my old tutor Nikias and the deplorable Egyptian pedant, who were even now snickering behind my back, and the octogenarian Lacotian chieftain-turned-senator Aquila, ludicrous in toga praetexta and eagle-feathered war-bonnet-cum-laurel-wreath — had taken leave of the River shortly into Iracuavia and then taken this magnificent new road, the Via Augusta, to Iracuavia through a pass in the Montes . . . the Montes Allegenii or some such barbarous name. Here and there were huge cities of ten and twenty thousand souls. There were public baths everywhere, and even the natives seemed to enjoy them, a sure sign that the process of Romanization was well in hand.

Ahead loomed our destination: the Circus Neronis of Alexandria, a towering edifice of gilt and white marble that paid tribute both to Roman ingenuity and to the monumental vulgarity of the Julian Caesars, now long gone. Trajan had planned games there to celebrate his state visit to the transatlantic provinces that comprise Terra Nova. I had heard that his Magnitude's miserliness was such, however, that one might as well have stayed at home as gone to the spectacle; nevertheless, an Imperial Summons *was* an Imperial summons.

"Very well, procurator. Come, we'll travel to the Circus together." I took this to be an invitation to join Him in His palanquin, but when I attempted to do so a second flabby eunuch came out and began to search me thoroughly, not neglecting my most personal of orifices; only then was I permitted to climb up.

"Can't stand these beastly things meself," Trajan was saying. "Spectacles . . . pfagh! Depleting my treasury for nothing. Saw enough killing in the war, you know, what. Come, you'll share the Imperial box, Titus, and you'll tell Us all about how your search for China is progressing, won't you now?"

So that was why I had been summoned! As if I hadn't already divined it

in my heart of hearts. It had been Domitian who had first instructed me that, according to the calculations of one Leukippos of dubious scholarly credentials, that China must be somewhere within this vast continent, and that I was to take a party and find it. Well, we'd been to the south, and there encountered the Olmechii, masters of super-science, with their jade were-jaguars, their levitating stone heads, their gilded motor-cars, and their hot-air balloons, not to mention their godlike rulers, little green men who flew about in golden houses shaped like saucers and who had told us they were in search of a time criminal guilty of "altering the continuity of the myriad parallel universes . . ." I had sent a message back to the Divine Domitian, telling him as little as possible, for I knew that no sober Roman could believe the tale, and I didn't want to be dismissed from my procuratorship as a madman. No. I like being as far from Rome as possible, make no mistake.

Domitian, and a couple of other little Emperors, too, had passed into the Godhood by the time my letter arrived; and Trajan, a crusty General turned cranky old miser, had been on the throne. I assured the Emperor that China did not exist . . . not here at least. That surely the caravans from India were a good enough supply route for silk . . . that a race so distant surely posed no military threat to Rome Herself!

He sent back ordering me to continue the search. Who did the man think he was, Alexander the Great? He wanted the whole world under his great fat thumb and that was all there was to it. I answered him with vague words; that was a year before. And now there he was, the bastard . . . I mean his Divinity, the August One, God Almighty . . . thus were my thoughts as, heart sinking, I joined the procession into the circus proper.

As we reached the box I saw that a venation was in progress: female hunters, their left breasts amputated in the manner of the mythical Amazons, were pursuing a herd of scrawny-looking moose and elk, with only a few dozen ostriches and crocodiles crawling around for exotic effects. The women were going at it with abandon; but the crowd seemed hardly interested at all, and the Emperor sat facing the other way, sucking delicately on an orange.

"China!" he said. "Tell Us about China!"

"Your Magnificence," I stammered, "I've been unable to make any progress since our little southern venture —"

"I might have guessed," said Caesar, still not looking at me. "Look here . . . the people are discontented! I give them lavish games . . . in Rome my grain coffers are almost empty from the constant handouts . . . they must have something new and wonderful to dream about, some new enemy to frighten them in their beds at night . . . complacency! They think they own the world!"

"But Caesar, they do own the world. At least, *you* do." And if he put a little more gold into the spectacles, he'd have had all Rome eating out of



his hand, of course. But it wouldn't do to tell him so. "It seems in any case, that there is a natural border to our westward expansion — the Montes Saxosi. I have scouted out a few passes," I hadn't, but it was time to start improvising, "but so far our explorations have borne little fruit."

"Hannibal crossed the Alps," said Trajan testily.

"True, O Caesar, but *he* knew where he was going."

"Indeed, General. Do you mean to say that you do *not* know where you're going? Is the land of China not an actual place? You dare assume I'm feeble-minded?"

"Your Magnitude — "

"Watch the spectacle. I paid good money for those ostriches."

I looked down. The Amazons had carefully avoided killing any of the ostriches, and after the corpses had been cleared slaves entered and began yoking the ostriches to little chariots. The people — a mere thousand at the most, scarcely filling one-fifth of the arena — seemed listless. "A clever idea, Caesar," I said. "I mean, using the ostriches twice."

"Oh, we'll use them more than twice before the day's over," the Emperor mumbled, poring over a map of Terra Nova. I turned my attention to the entertainment. The band sounded a lugubrious sennet; at last a cheer went up from the throng, and I saw several elephants being led in through the gates of life. At last, I thought, some genuine expense! "Your Majesty had these elephants brought with you, by ship, I suppose?" I said, hoping to lighten the tone of our conversation.

"Good Heavens! Who do you take me for, Nero? These elephants have been here since the founding of Alexandria; Nero sent them over, you know, frighten the natives and all that sort of thing. Vespasian sent a few dozen more to liven up the games . . . got a whole herd of them now. The Chirochi have proved excellent elephant trainers. Watch this now — elephants mounted by Numidians racing against pygmies in ostrich chariots. Just like the days of Vespasian, eh?"

"Didn't the late God Vespasian use five hundred of each?"

"Ah well, hard times, hard times. And he didn't have this blasted Chinish question to contend with." Trajan staggered off his seat and off-handedly threw a handkerchief into the arena. The race began; soon the ostriches had lost their direction and the pygmies were being trampled by elephants, much to the amusement of the populace. Trajan watched, slitty-eyed with rage for a moment, then shouted, "Don't kill 'em! Wasting good pygmies like that . . . five hundred sestertii apiece, you nincompoop! There, there —"

Without question it was one of the most uninteresting spectacles I had ever watched; not that I love gore for its own sake, as the plebeians do, but one does need new twists, imaginative killings, and so on. I sat back on my couch and turned to look at the others in the Emperor's box. One, in particular, overdressed and overripe, the breasts heaving like watermel-

ons, kept making cow-eyes at me, much to my dismay.

"You like the Lady Oenothea, daughter of the King of Cilicia?" Trajan said. He nudged my elbow and leered.

"Well — "

"Very good. It's settled then. She is to be your wife, and will journey with you to the land of Chin."

"I — "

"Yes, my word." Caesar fussed with a fold of his frayed tunic (not, I noticed, the latest in fashion or color) and continued, "You see, Papinian, I'm instigating a new image for the White and Greatest Father. You know, soften up the old harsh paternalistic bit, have a little more of Old Mother Rome and what have you. That's what the Lady Oenothea will provide. The other face of Janus, you know. Satisfies one of my client kings, too, in the bargain."

"Your Majesty has a wondrous eye for . . . a good bargain," I said, almost choking. The stampeding of the beasts below was now evoking the odd belly-laugh from the audience, I noted.

"And one more thing: you are now to be surnamed *Lacoticus*, conqueror of the Lacotii."

"But I did no such thing."

"Of course not, but propaganda goes far, and I'm not giving you very many men, so you'll have to make do with a reputation, fabricated by me, of fearlessness and ruthlessness."

"Yes, Caesar." What more could he do to me? The Lady Oenothea began sidling in my direction. I coughed and stared at the spectacle beneath.

"It only remains," Trajan said pompously, "to determine now the exact *means* of your glorious journey into the Montes Saxosi. Did you say something about Hannibal, old fellow?"

I looked at the elephants.

"You don't mean — "

They were standing on their hind legs now, trumpeting as they trampled giant and dwarf alike, now and then swatting ostriches with their trunks.

"But Caesar — "

"Why not? This herd of miscreant pachyderms is a great drain on the privy purse, you know. They eat too much hay . . . and I'm not planning to stage anything this lavish in the provinces again, not for a long while. Why not give them to you, have them forage on the way to China rather than siphoning gold from Our pockets with their trunks? Besides which, Hannibal . . . ah, Hannibal . . ." I noticed him counting off the points one by one on his fingers, with relentless logic. "I need something to strike the fear of God, that is to say of Yours Truly, into whatever lower beings you may encounter. Part of the new image, you might say."

"My lord, we don't even know whether the Montes Saxosi are indeed the only barrier to a westerly route to the silklands. Besides that, Hannibal . . . didn't exactly win the Punic Wars, you know, Sire."

"My dear General Titus Papinianus!" he said, oozing charm. "Hannibal, you recall, was going against the Might and Majesty of Rome Itself, while you are simply to swat down a few miserable peasants."

"You can't have it both ways, Caesar: they can't be both miserable peasants *and* a vast threat to national security." He glared at me. I had said too much. Now I knew for sure that Trajan had been touched by the madness that affects all Emperors, no matter how benign their original intentions.

He continued to glare, his beady eyes glittering, as my heart sank slowly down my toga, down to my very caligae. What was he waiting for? Ah yes, of course, I hadn't thanked him for the elephants . . . "I say, your Omnipotence, awfully decent of you, what . . ."

He relaxed his gaze a little, then raised his hand and said, almost inaudibly, "All hail, Titus Papinianus Lacoticus, scourge of the Lacotii!"

The others echoed in a straggly sort of unison, and one by one came up to congratulate me.

Congratulate!

There were Praetorian guardsmen. There were the Imperial household eunuchs. There were senators. Finally, from the throng, came G. Pomponius Piso the younger himself, a ratlike man, quite different from his grandfather, the magnificent general who had conquered most of the new world for the Emperor Nero. He was such an insignificant sort of person that I hadn't even noticed him squatting in the back of the Imperial Box. He pressed a sweaty hand into mine and whispered: "Thank you, oh, thank you, those elephants were the ruin of me, I'm awfully relieved to have you take them off my hands, old chap, you know, what . . ."

The lady Oenothra enveloped me in a rancid embrace.

I was speechless for a long while. Then a stream of inconsequential platitudes came bubbling forth: "Er . . . sic transit . . . um, morituri te salutant, eh, what? . . . alea jacta est, if I say so myself. . . ."

"Fine sentiments," said the Emperor, beaming expansively, "and worthy of a true Roman."

Of the preparations for this epic journey I shall say but little. Suffice it that Trajan, having overwhelmed me with lofty and comprehensive commands, was rather more reluctant to back up his words with gold. He had an accountant figure out the market value of one dozen elephants in fine condition (a somewhat inflated figure, since one or two of the beasts he gave us were hardly in the pink of health) and then proceeded to deduct this amount from the already ungenerous 10,000 aurei allocated for this enterprise. The result being a negative figure of some few sester-

ces, he actually had his chief eunuch bring me a bill for the difference! Naturally, fearful as always for my head, I sent the Emperor a note praising his magnanimity, foresight, and frugality in flowery terms; and upon reaching Lacotia and my own capital city of Caesarea-on-Miserabilis, I immediately set about raising money.

I was forced to levy a most unpopular tax on the exchange of scalps among the Lacotii. This was a rather frequent event, and, since the Lacotians consider the obtaining and trading of scalps to be a matter of religious significance and personal pride, there were few who would purposely shirk the obligation of declaring a scalp exchange. But the paperwork was excruciating. I appointed a whole army of quaestors whose sole function was the notarization of scalp trades and the marking of fresh scalps; for this we used a serial numbering system, affixing the number to the scalp by means of a little tag of buffalo bone. Of course, a new industry sprang up . . . polishing and marking the little bones, which, for a number like MMMMM, might be a mere splinter, but for a serial number such as MMMMMDDCCCLXXXXVIII might be a considerable chunk of humerus or tibia, adding considerable weight to the scalp itself. Luckily there was no lack of petty criminals in my Caesarian dungeons, and these same were only too glad to do something that not only let them out in the open air now and then, but also required relatively little flogging. One could not afford too much clemency, of course, since this among my subjects was viewed as womanly weakness; indeed, those among my criminals who were Lacotian often complained bitterly that our excruciations were much less agonizing than their regular initiation rites.

But. . .

Surely these dull details of a governor's day-to-day duties are an uninteresting digression; so I will continue with the tale of our Great Quest.

A strange procession it was indeed that began lumbering up the River Miserabilis that Kalends of May. I had persuaded the two cantankerous pedants to come along with some difficulty; it was with greater ease that I had persuaded Aquila to leave this (as he termed it) life of decadence.

First, then, came half a dozen elephants, with their Chirochian mahouts, each bearing upon its back one of the little battle-towers we had seen used by the Indish race. Our infantry numbered a mere century, our equites a single squadron; and we had a mere two or three hundred of the usual camp followers: slaves, merchants, smiths, prostitutes, cooks and what have you. I, my . . . ah . . . wife, and the triumvirate of old men followed last, in a sort of mobile palatium drawn by four yoked elephants; two mangier ones lagged behind, performing no duties more onerous than eating and eliminating. We were forced to live in an atmosphere befouled by the constant exercise of the latter, and it was not long before I

yearned for the relative comfort of Caesarea. . . .

A fortnight after we left Caesarea we reached the Lacotian border, having left the river and headed due west. There was a little garrison there, a minuscule tidbit of Rome in the midst of a vast expanse of great plain sprinkled with impenetrable forests; for the last time we were able to bathe like civilized people, and were even entertained by the modest spectacle of a few military executions and a fairly workmanlike crucifixion of a runaway slave.

And then . . . the wilderness of Siannia! An untamed territory as vast as Lacotia, perhaps, but more inhospitable and riddled with hostile Sianii, a race much like the Lacotii before we civilized them, but whose language was incomprehensible. Here too lurked other tribes: Apsarochii, Arapahovii, and others whose names cannot be rendered at all in an unbarbarous tongue. I sent out scouts regularly now to look for passes: for soon the Montes Saxosi would be upon us, and already we were skirting a minor range that we had named the Montes Negri. Yet, while not a day passed without some skirmish with the natives, they were annoyances, nothing more. Soon the Lacotians among our centurions were all sporting a scalp or two (with serial number attached, of course — for where *I* was, Rome's long arm had perforce to be felt) on their cuirasses, or perhaps hanging gaily on a corner of their scuta or from the sharp tips of their pila. For a time nature was bountiful; we hunted and feasted on aurochs and venison, and there was plenty of elephant fodder.

As we approached the Montes Negri, the terrain deteriorated into badlands, and life became considerably less idyllic. The elephants ranged far in search of the dry, husklike shrubbery that dotted the stony waste; the landscape was barren, interrupted only by fantastical spires and monoliths of rock, unnatural shapes no doubt left long ago by the battles of the Titans at the dawn of time. The nights were bleakly orchestrated by the baying of *quoiotuli*, exotic feral dogs whose meat even the Lacotii found unpalatable.

In all that time I bedded the Lady Oenothea but once; then I left her to her own devices, finding better pickings among the camp followers. It was a few days after that lardy tussle that we found ourselves encamped beneath a certain hanging rock, sitting around the fire imbibing the dregs of the sorriest Falernian, which I had been forced to dilute with muddy river-water.

"We will never reach China," I said. "There is no hope. We must turn back. Perhaps there'll be a different Emperor by then —"

"You will find China," said Oenothea, making it sound like an order. "Trajan says so."

Nikias and Aaye began to nod excitedly to one another. "Ah ha!" said the latter. "I think it's time to bring out the book."

"What book?" I said. "More Egyptian hocus-pocus? More slapdash

scholarship and overhasty conclusions?"

"Fetch the book," Nikias said. Grinning, the Egyptian went into his tent and returned with a scroll.

"Here!" He triumphantly threw it into my arms, knocking me into an elephant's outstretched trunk. It wrapped itself around my neck, half-choking me, and raised me high into the air, dangling me over the campfire.

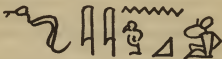
"Let me down at once, you miscreant!" I shouted, letting go of the book. The two scholars dashed after it, giving no thought to their General as he swung over the flames.

"General, how can you possibly think of your own safety now, in view of one of the most exciting discoveries of the century?" said Aaye. "Proof that your legendary land actually exists, in exactly the place we calculated, to wit just beyond the Montes Saxosi —"

"Down! Down, you perfidious pachyderm!"

The creature dashed me on the hard rock, giving my tender buttocks quite a turn. I found the opened manuscript brushing the end of my nose, with the Greek and the Egyptian on either side of me jabbering furiously.

I looked at the title, which stated in large red letters —



"My hieroglyphics," I said testily, "aren't quite what they used to be." For of course, I couldn't read a word.

"Come, come," said Nikias. "Surely you recall something of what I taught you as a child. You know: determinatives, trilaterals, what have you? And those signs that are used for suggesting vowels when transcribing Greek and Latin."

"Indeed," I said, "I see a snake, two reeds, a wiggly line a quail, a triangle, and a man stuffing something into his mouth. The last glyph being a determinative, this suggests to me . . . a cookbook?"

"You fool!" said Aaye. "How dare you mock the sacred wisdom of the ancients? Listen, barbarian of a Roman, and I'll construe the thing to you. The determinative is of speech. The other characters, from left to right, spell the name of a language:

*TCH-Y-N-W-K!*

In short, *Chinook!* It is a dictionary of the *Chinook* speech! Now what else could that mean, but that we have here a transcription into Egyptian letters of the *Chinish* tongue? Incontrovertibly and indisputably the two words are cognate. And — as to the location of the *Chinish* land — an inscription ensues in Greek, which I trust the General is literate enough to follow."

I read:

Copy of a scroll of the Alexandria Library, Iracuavia; original scroll dated the Seventh Year of Lucius Domitius who is known as Nero, Emperor of Rome [a whole slew of concatenary titles followed here].

I, Rennut-Keb, philologist of the Terra Novan exploratory party (licensed by the Emperor) of Anaxagoras of Athens, do hereby set down these words in the hieroglyphic tongue, that the learning I have gleaned may pass only to those worthy of receiving it. On the Kalends of May last, a certain prisoner, of unusual facial aspect and speaking both Lacotian, Athapascan, and a smattering of Greek, was charged with treason and sentenced to a routine slow torture and death. I visited the prisoner during the process of excruciation, and he informed me (between groans, which I have not bothered to insert into the body of the text proper) that he had been captured by Lacotii, but that in reality he was the son of a rich chief from a distant land beyond the Montes Saxosi, eaters of the fiery-colored fish; that his father's kingdom was vast beyond our imaginings (I set his words down *verbatim*, poor wretch that has not seen Rome, Athens, Alexandria); and that if released he would "potlatch" us many gifts. While it was not possible for me to ameliorate his fate, I was nonetheless able to obtain much instruction in this *lingua franca* Chinook, which, he claimed, was spoken throughout a territory a thousand miles in breadth. The dictionary (many of whose words I must render only approximately, given the condition of the informant) follows forthwith.

There followed a series of words, all transliterated into hieroglyphics, with translations into the Egyptian tongue alongside them. Aaye read out such strange-sounding words as *muckamuck* for *food*, *ticky* for *desire*, *want*, *lust*, and so on.

"I have looked over the manuscript myself," said Nikias, "and am reasonably convinced."

"Good heavens," I said in utter amazement. "Oh, I say, bloody brilliant bit of reasoning, eh, what?" I was impressed despite my determination to believe nothing the Egyptian said.

Then Aquila, who had been sitting with his eyes closed, smoking some foul-smelling weed from his fascis medicinae, suddenly opened his eyes and began to laugh uncontrollably.

"What's the matter with *you*?" I said.

"My dear General . . . oh, ho, ho, ho . . . it so happens that you have merely uncovered the trade jargon of the western lands, used to communicate between tribes, and not dissimilar to the sign-language of the great

plains. I myself have seen such western Terra Novans captured, and heard the language spoken . . . ”

“My dear Aquila,” I said, mustering my patience. “You are a senator and a Roman citizen, but a certain savagery clings to you even now. Don’t you realize that books are sacred? Do you dare distrust that Roman scholarship which has made her might secure throughout the known world?”

Aquila closed his eyes and returned to his reverie.

“Ah yes,” I said, “it must remain our divinely appointed duty, onerous but necessary, to open the eyes of and lift the veils of darkness from the savage mind . . . ”

Realizing that my metaphors were now hopelessly mixed, and that Nikias would be squirming with horror, I stopped. “Where’s Oenothea?”

“Slipped back to her tent,” said Nikias. “Had a grim look about her.”

It was, as I adjudged, now time for my husbandly duty again; so I decided to go towards her tent.

As I approached it (its entrance was hidden behind the legs of an elephant, making my egress most unpleasant) I saw a man slip away.

“Cuckolding me, eh?” I wrestled him to the ground beneath the belly of the elephant, who promptly anointed us both. A scroll slipped from his hand. I seized it and stalked into the tent, where Oenothea was lolling about on the bed.

“What is this, pray?” I waved the letter. It rolled open; in the dim torchlight I made out a few words —

*To the . . . trajan . . . greeting . . . have uncovered Egyptian manuscript . . . titus is . . . a fool. . . .*

“My dear woman,” I said, astonished. “You’re — a spy!”

“Of course,” she said, “and the more fool you, not to have guessed by now.”

“Of course. Wife — new image for the Empire — spy, all rolled into one. Three for a single price. And I don’t suppose you were that expensive, eh? The Emperor’s killed too many birds with one stone this time, if you ask me!”

Tears began streaming down her flabby, kohl-stained cheeks. “My dear Titus,” she said, “please don’t send me away! I’ll let you do anything you want, but don’t do that . . . Trajan has blackmailed my father and —”

“More birds with this single stone!” I said. “Must be a veritable megalith.”

“If you send me back he’ll have my father killed — ”

“Good heavens!” I said. “Well, I’m no great lover of his Niggardly Majesty myself, so I suppose compassion is in order, eh, what? But don’t let me catch you again, or you’ll have the nearest lions eating out of your hand, if you get my drift.”

“You’re very kind, my Lord,” she said, gulping. “Perhaps you’d care



for a few . . . rites of the bedchamber?"

"Not at the moment."

Suddenly a dozen war-painted savages leapt out of the shadows. Oenothea screeched. I heard a shout outside: "Siannian raid! To arms!" and bucinae began braying. I threw a torch at the nearest Sianius; it missed and set the tent-wall on fire. Oenothea threw herself on a nearby savage and sat on him, gouging at his eyes. Just then the elephant parked outside our tent-flap, roused by the commotion, came charging into the tent, scattering the natives. I unsheathed my gladius and found myself hacking away at the empty air.

As I left the tent I found Aquila, fully awakened, unleashing arrow after arrow into the distance.

"They've stolen all our horses!" he shouted. Legionaries were bustling about, dragging heavy ballistae; but there was nary a savage to be seen except for our own.

There was an ominous silence save for the howling of a distant quioiotulus.

"That's no quioiotulus," said Aquila, "but one of *them*, signaling. I think I'd better do one of my dances."

So saying he doffed his tunic and stood in a breechclout in the chilly air.

"You'll catch your death," I said.

"Oh, I'll be warmed up in no time," he said, and began to prance energetically about, wailing and wheezing his mystic formulae. As he began I heard the cornua hooting, and I saw the hostiles, mounted, massed in the moonlight, coming for us in a cloud of dust.

"Torches!" I shouted. "Fireballs! Burn a few tents so we can see!" As I spoke, tents blazed behind me. Elephants trumpeted; I ordered them placed in a straggly line facing the Sianii, and the few men we had to form a wall of scuta. I knew the shields would not hold for long, and that we were a mere hundred men; but we were Romans, by Jove, and we'd fight them to the finish.

The dust came nearer; hoofbeats pounded like a distant earthquake. "For heaven's sake, Aquila, will you stop dancing? We're doomed, old chap!"

Presently came the ululations of the savages, and the first rain of arrows struck the shields at once with a resounding clang. The braves were bearing down now, and our Lacotian legionaries were answering them with whoops of their own. Horseless as they were, they broke ranks and began to rush toward the hostiles.

"What the . . . come back, come back, you fools!" I screamed.

"They're Lacotii first, Romans second," huffed Aquila, never missing a beat of his maenad dance. "Can't expect them to listen to discipline, you know. Glory's what they're after —"

"But they'll get killed!"

A Siannian warrior landed at our feet. Aquila paused to count coup, then continued, dancing the while: "Precisely! It's a jolly good day to die, as we Lacotii always say." I watched him, bug-eyed, as he nonchalantly continued with his wheezing song. "Ah . . . ah . . . I feel it working now . . . yes, indeed . . . ." As suddenly as he had begun, he stopped.

"Come to your senses at last?"

"Oh no, O procurator. Now I'd like a good steam bath. Have one of your orderlies prepare one, please."

"But — but — "

"My dear General, relax! It has worked. Look, there, up at the sky."

I looked.

I gaped.

I screamed.

Flying saucers were streaming from the sky! It was just like that day, back in the land of the Olmechii. The night exploded with a thousand brilliant colors. Thunder crashed. Streaks of light rained everywhere. I saw the Siannian braves look up in horror, their horses rearing, whinnying wildly. They were fleeing now, every which way. Behind me, our elephants had fallen asleep, tired out from carrying the war-towers on their backs, the poor dears.

"Good heavens, Aquila!" I said. "I thought we were done for sure!"

"That we are not, my dear General, is a tribute to the excellent discipline of the Roman Army, and can hardly be attributed to *your* bumbling leadership," said Aquila, snorting.

"But the Olmechian flying saucers . . . to have them appear so far from their super-scientific abode . . . I must instruct everyone to wear their were-jaguar amulets at once!" For these little jade trinkets, each a representation of one of the godlike green were-jaguars who ruled over the Olmechii, had been given us as a remembrance by our old friend V'Denni-Kenni, the leader of — what was the Mystical Title of their Sect? Ah, yes. The Dimensional Patrol. "Surely this Lacotian magic is astounding!"

"Indeed! Not to mention amazing!"

"But seriously! Good heavens, I mean, to be able to summon the godlike Olmechian flying saucers from their divine homes in the south . . . however did you do this?"

"Frankly, general, I just made it up as I went along. I couldn't do it again if I tried."

"But — "

"Clears the mind, dancing, you know, when you're desperately trying to figure out what to do in what is clearly a hopeless situation. Keeps you lot mystified, too, this prancing around. You Romans are so superstitious."

"I am too much a Roman to be bothered by the misguided ravings of a barbarian," I said stiffly, automatically. "But this leaves us with one more

question." I looked up at the sky. No trace remained of the recent pyrotechnics. It was a cold, clear, beautiful night. "Why, in the name of Hades, are these flying saucers following us, and why have they bothered to save our lives?"

"Beats me."

Although our skins had happily been saved by the appearance of the flying saucers, not many of our horses remained, and our casualties numbered fifty wounded.

I resolved then and there to command that a garrison be built in a suitable spot; that the standard of Rome be set up within this garrison, creating in the name of the Emperor a sort of a province of Siannia, though how long we could continue to hold it was a matter of some conjecture.

Nikias, Aaye and I argued a little about what to call the fort. I argued in vain for Papiniana, after the illustrious Yours Truly; but it was not to be. Well, speed, naturally, was of the essence; and so I opted for a simple name, expressive of our purpose: I elected to call it the *Castra Celeritatis*, or Camp of Rapidity.

Upon reflection, though, I decided that a more grandiose name was necessary, if we hoped thereby to make Trajan think this construction of logs a city worthy to be capital of a new province.

We therefore aggrandized the fort's name to *Urbs Celeritatis*, or Rapid City. I dispatched an epistle to His Magnitude at once, informing Him of the latest annexation and of the founding of another *urbs*, making somewhat inflated claims about our prowess and about the number and mightiness of the enemy's powers.

Clearly, though, the search for China could not continue.

But it was Nikias who said: "My Lord, it is now almost June. Surely this continent can't be much wider. The Montes Saxosi lie but a short way westward; beyond them, the Land of Chin, if it exists at all, is sure to lie. It can't take more than a couple of weeks at the most."

He was right, I supposed. It couldn't hurt to move on a bit, just for a little peek. Surely not! And so I left most of my little army behind in command of one Cornelius; all the camp followers and assorted civilians I left under the governance of Nikias, for I feared for his health. He had been my tutor so long ago, and I didn't want him dying of snakebite. Aaye could have survived anything, he was so thick-skinned; and Aquila, oldest of all of us, would clearly not be persuaded to remain, since he was by far the most able warrior among us. Yes! Even I, a stalwart Roman, was forced at times to admit that this barbarian possessed an innate cunning despite, or perhaps even because of, his savage origins, for a civilized man might not stoop so low as to have acquired that oneness with the elements that enabled Aquila to sniff out his way through danger with

the adroitness of a forest animal. It was with such circuitous reasoning that I justified to myself my need to have the old bastard about me.

We had the small band of friends, thirty legionaries, and a handful of horsemen, and the full complement of elephants. My wife Oenothra came too, for I couldn't very well trust her to run loose at the fort without my supervision.

Scouts ahead found a fairly wide pass in the Montes Saxosi, towards which we made our way. I had hoped that we would now be rid of the Olmechian flying saucers; but now that I knew of their existence I too sighted them almost daily. Were they trying to show us the way? I gave up on the scouts and followed the saucers; always they showed us the least impenetrable route.

The Saxosi are the most extraordinary range of mountains I have ever encountered. Even from a distance they seem like the very walls of the universe; an endless blue expanse, the highest peaks capped forever in white. It was hard to believe that an advanced civilization might lie beyond them, but at the same time it was difficult to question the validity of a document from a source as august and impeccable as the great Library of Alexandria-in-Iracuavia.

While the attacks of Sianii and others had become less frequent, owing no doubt to the rapidly spreading news that we controlled vast supernatural powers and were able to bring down spirit armies from the transethereal plane (rumors I neither deserved nor discouraged) and the presence of the Roman garrison beside the Mountes Negri, we soon found nature even more of an enemy than any hostile natives. For, as Aaye pointed out, mountains, being by their very nature tall and therefore a little closer to the cold and chaste purity of the quintessence whereof the superlunary bodies are made, are not particularly suitable environments for humans, bound as they are by faulty admixtures of the four elements. "Do humans live on Olympus?" he said as we shivered in the towering shadows of one promontory. "Of course not. Perhaps we are guilty of hubris . . . of meddling in that which man was not meant to know!"

"Yet Trajan is a god," I replied, throwing a fourth blanket over my cloak, "and it is by his command that we are here."

"A god by decree of the Senate," said Aquila, who seemed not to feel the cold at all, but occasionally performed a rousing dance wearing little but his breechclout. "Besides, it could be a lot worse. We could be scaling that peak yonder, where even an eagle — an *aquila* — would have trouble roosting." He laughed at his own pun.

"I only hope your crackpot theory is right, Aaye," I said, "about being able to find another river, twin to the Miserabilis, to lead us downward from the mountains."

"There is absolutely no doubt, General."

"That is precisely what I fear the most."

"But General Titus . . ." Aaye said. "The Platonic theory of ideals decrees specifically that the world must strive toward symmetry."

"To strive is not to succeed."

A hideous groan, like the water-organ at the Flavian Amphitheater in Rome, drowned our conversation for a moment.

"Good heavens!" I said. "Another elephant collapse, eh, what?" Running against the bitter wind, I made my way toward the sound. The elephant was unsalvageable; I directed that its trunk be removed, this being the only edible portion, and the creature buried in a seemly fashion, for we had come far together. As I was seeing to the elephant's disposal, I heard another shout.

I ran to the head of the column. "Oh, what's the bloody matter?" Soldiers had gathered around some large, whitish rocks. They all looked up for a moment, and then I saw Aaye, who was peering at something in the rocks and muttering to himself in Egyptian.

I looked in the approximate direction of their wildly gesticulating hands. I saw bones. *Giant* bones.

Heavens! I do not say *giant* lightly. These were bones of such creatures as my nursemaid might have described to me when I was an infant, to frighten me to sleep; they dwarfed by far the bones of elephants and rhinoceroi. We were standing on a ledge over a sheer drop of some hundred passus. Ahead, on the other side of the rift, which I judged to be relatively recent, were skeletons of serpentine creatures, half-sunken in the rock.

"The very Titans themselves!" I whispered. "Bones from the dawn of time!"

Aaye began to laugh uproariously at me. "Such an incurable romantic, General! You Romans . . . pshaw! How little do you realize that this discovery vindicates the whole purpose of our little odyssey . . . that these bones are nothing more or less than the remains of silkworms!"

"Heavens," I said, somewhat disappointed. "They look pretty ancient to me. Are you sure they're not something dating back to the Golden Age itself? I mean, P. Josephus Agricola's writings on the theory of giant silkworms is just a theory, isn't it? Perhaps a theory that smacks more than a little of *scientiae fictiones*?"

"You forget," Aaye said, smirking, "the important circumstantial evidence; the Chinook dictionary, the fact that silk is still traded daily in the marketplaces of the Empire —"

"Wait a minute. Are you telling me that this *proves* the existence of China?"

"Indubitably! Inarguably! Indisputably!"

"Then not for nothing have we come all this way, and braved so much?"

Our comrades had all caught up now, and stood gazing in awe across

the gorge of bones.

"Don't look like no silkworms to me," said one legionary. "Them things is lizards, giant lizards."

"If I had to coin a phrase for 'em," said some Greek, "it'd be *dinosauria*. Terrible lizards, like."

"How dare you lower the morale of the company?" I railed. "Fifty lashes apiece, on the double!"

"Begging your pardon, General," said the quarrelsome Greek, "but we ain't been paid in two months."

We may have conquered the Greeks, but we have never taught them discipline. "A hundred lashes!" I raged. "Two hundred!"

"Now let's not go overboard here," said Aquila. "They've a right to their opinion."

"Truly, O procurator!" said Aaye. "These simple soldiers cannot possibly comprehend the complexities of modern scientific inquiry and theory."

"Very well," I said grandly. "I suppose you fellows are not to blame for lacking a classical education. Commuted . . . but don't let me hear such rubbish again!"

"Thank you, General, Sir!" they chorused, scurrying off.

I turned to gaze proudly upon the bones of the Chinish silkworms. For the first time I felt truly in command of this mission. It was good, too, to have begun by commuting the soldiers' sentence, an act of clemency that could not but augur well for our success. In my excitement I had the late elephant, whose burial I had earlier commanded, exhumed, and had our travelling all-purpose-priest examine its entrails, which were also remarkably favorable; and I ordered castra set up right there, in the Valley of Dead Silkworms.

Later I was to discover that my name for the gorge had not stuck, but that the soldiers had in fact named it the Valley of the Dinosauria, after that stupid Greek's incautious remark; thus it is that the ignorant rule the earth, and those who endeavor to enlighten them are invariably forgotten.

Things went more smoothly from then on — for a while at least. The pass we had discovered was, by Aaye's reckoning, southwest of the Montes Negri. Northward lay some of the tallest peaks of the Montes Saxosi; but to the south they were less steep, and we were able to march along some reasonably unumpy terrain; it was for the most part short, brown, scrubby grassland, but adequate fodder for the remaining half-dozen elephants.

A fortnight after entering this stretch of territory we encountered the first of the backwards-flowing rivers, proving once and for all the validity of Platonic Idealism.

"And if we follow this river long enough," Aaye exclaimed excitedly, "we'll reach the Persian Gulf — and good old Roman Egypt! So it must

be somewhere along this river, this land of Chin . . . just beyond the easternmost borders of the Empire . . . truly, O procurator, we Roman citizens have conquered all the world, if but this small strip remains to be subdued . . .”

“Let’s not count our chickens, and all that,” I said, as I motioned our Chirochian mahouts to take the elephants down to bathe in the waters. “I know these Chinish are supposed to be philosopher folk, and are thus liable to be as namby-pamby as the Greeks were when our legions annexed their lands; and that there is of course no match for Roman strategy, cunning, and ingenuity anywhere in the world” — I thought for a moment of the Olmechii, but dismissed the uncomfortable notion of their possible superiority from my mind — “yet my father taught me always to be cautious in my dealings with barbarians of any type.”

“An admirable sentiment, my Lord,” Aaye said.

“And Aaye, pray tell me,” I said, “you seem to be the expert . . . precisely what river is this?”

“Without a doubt, General, it is the Ganges.”

“I see.” I gave out some more orders about the pitching of castra. “Oh, Aquila!”

“Yes, General?” For some reason he had chosen today to wear a bewilderingly gaudy robe, stitched with sea-shells of different kinds, and his head was adorned with a golden wreath, eagle feathers, and beads. Several scalps, one sporting a particularly long bone-serial number tag, hung from his waist and his painted shield.

“Good heavens,” I said. “Is this a wedding?”

“No, I’m just preparing myself to meet this Chinish folk of yours on their own terms.”

“So you’ve given up your notion that this Chinook is a savage trade language, bowing to superior wisdom and so on!”

He began to laugh. “Sometimes I wonder how you people ever managed to conquer your own front porticos, let alone the world.”

“You’ll eat your words, Aquila!”

As the days passed I learned that ignorance had triumphed again: that the soldiers had decided to name the Ganges River the *Flumen Serpentis*, or Snake River, because of its many tortuous twists. As Aaye debated over whether the Montes Saxosi were in fact identical to the legendary *Himavantish* or *Himalayan* Mountains where dwell the *homines abominabiles nivis* (abominable men of snow) frequently mentioned in those popular romances which so often attempt to pass themselves off as more rigorous scientiae fictiones, we descended into a verdant plain that hugged the river for many miles on each side. It was lush, unspoiled land; there were a few native villages here and there, which we subjugated without difficulty, using the surprise value of our elephants to good effect.

And yet, as the mountain wall receded ever farther to the east, we still found no vast cities, no temples, no pathways such as might be made by the constant ambulations of silkworms. And the Lady Oenothea became subject to constant fits of weeping which I was at a loss to alleviate.

"You don't love me!" she screamed, pummeling me with her fists as the elephant lumbered forward like a trireme in a storm.

"My dear woman," I said, "it seems hardly fair for you to expect me to do so, considering that the Emperor foisted you off on me purely for your symbolic value. Not to mention your spying."

"I'd rather be married to some savage who adores me than to you! Procurator of Lacotia indeed!"

"Given your perfidious nature, my dear, I'm not surprised. But you are hardly in a position to become shrewish at the moment — "

"General! General!" came a shout from the head of the column. "They're here! They're here!"

"Who? Who?" I kicked the elephant, hoping to hurry it on a bit; but no luck. The creature was in a most refractory mood. I waited patiently while all the pachyderms were led behind me to form what was supposed to be an impressive array, and for the little band to gather in some semblance of order.

"Canoes approaching, General, sir!" said a legionary. "Dozens of them, by Jupiter!"

Very well! Infantry — set up scuta, Equites — here behind me. Heavens try to look a little more menacing! We've lost a lot of discipline on this trip, I can see that! Standard bearer, beside me — bucina, be ready to give them a blast upon my signal! At long last we're going to have a little spectacle around here!"

There was much clanking and bumping of heads as the soldiers, no longer used to proper formations and so on, ran around trying to find their places.

I pulled out a scroll on which Aaye had copied a number of important phrases from the Chinook dictionary — in hieroglyphics — and Nikias had, back at the fort, glossed them with approximate pronunciations in Greek letters. "*Nika potlach muckamuck*," I mumbled to myself. "*Nika wakeh kumtux*. . . ."

They were coming now, rounding a bend of this Ganges River. The canoes were manned by sleek-muscled oarsmen; their prows were carved into the images of frightful deities. The savages wore no silk at all — indeed, apart from a few decorative seashells, they were quite naked. I took the abundance of seashells to be a good sign, suggesting that we were not too far from the Persian Gulf and from civilization; as for their lack of silk, it was not to be thought proper for mere galley-slaves such as these to be wearing such costly materials.

"It is just as P. Josephus Agricola said in his treatise on the legend of



China!" Aaye said (from another elephant). "These canoes are nothing but the sloughed-off skins of silkworms, hardened with an unguent of naphtha and embalming fluids!"

"Look like wooden dugouts to me," said a voice from a more distant elephant.

"Silence!" I shouted, recognizing the voice of that Greek skeptic who had dared rename my silkworms dinosaurs.

The canoes had reached our bank now, and I could see the Chinish men clambering ashore. They waved bone-tipped spears at us, but seeing our elephants came no nearer.

"Call a parley!" I cried, unfolding my phrasebook to its fullest. Aquila, garbed in his ludicrous finery, I, Aaye, and Oenothia dismounted our elephantine palanquins and came forward, the aquilifer with his SPQR-blazoned eagle striding proudly ahead.

As we approached, the naked savages broke ranks; and some grand-looking chieftains of theirs emerged. They wore full bonnets of multi-colored plumes, and impressive cloaks of animal hides criss-crossed with necklaces of seashells. At their head was a pot-bellied, hawknosed fellow who did not appear terribly pleased.

They made straight for Aquila and began to address him in strange, whining tones.

"What is the meaning of this?" I said, outraged.

"I can't help it," Aquila said, "if among those present it is I who have the most regal demeanor." With a superb gesture he stripped off his cloak and handed it to the Chinish chieftain.

There was a moment of suspense as the chief looked it over, examining its workmanship; then, with an equally majestic flick of the wrist, he took off his own and handed it to Aquila. Both went through the motions of surprise at having received so great a gift, and disdain for the small worth of his own offering. This ceremony being completed, spontaneous applause broke out on both sides.

"That's it, Aquila!" said Aaye. "We'll be trading silks in no time."

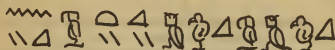
"Now wait a minute," I said, charging up to the two Terra Novan chieftains. "I'm in command here, don't you know! I'll do the parleying, if you don't mind!"

The Chinnok chieftain turned his attention to me, and I got the distinct impression that he did not think very much of me. "You'll pay Caesar's tax," I whispered to Aquila, "on the trading of every one of those scalps hanging on that vulgar garment you just gave away!"

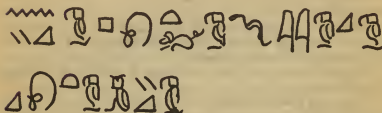
The Chinooks continued to stare at me. Aquila shrugged. It was now entirely up to me to negotiate some kind of treaty with these natives, with some provisions for the trading of silk, and perhaps for the use of a few silkworms in the arena — what a spectacle that would be! — and so I cleared my throat portentously and glanced over my scroll of Chinish

expressions, trying to find one moderately appropriate.

Now, the left-hand side of the scroll, with its Chinook words transliterated in Egyptian and then re-glossed with Greek, began something like this:



νικα τλκλ μουκαμουκ



νικα πωτλατς ιακα  
κωπα μικα

There was no problem here; barbarous as the sounds were, it would not be too hard, by following the Greek subscription, to frame them to my tongue. It was when I started to look for the translation that I ran into trouble. There wasn't one. Well, there was, but it was in Egyptian alone. Those blasted pedants!

What was I to do? I turned to the others of my party, but they were all awaiting my next move. The barbarians were waiting, too. The future of Chinish-Roman relations depended on what I was about to say.

I decided to start at the beginning and work my way through. "*Nika ticky muckamuck!*" I said sternly, hoping that my tone, if not the words themselves, would establish in their eyes the might and majesty of Rome.

The chiefs looked at each other for a moment. Was this a declaration of war? So much the better; I could send for reinforcements and annex the land in a matter of months. After all, with our Persian Gulf possessions on one side and our Lacotians on the other, we had them surrounded.

The head chieftain clapped his hands; a naked savage brought forth a magnificent platter piled high with salmon and other delicacies. Ah yes, I remembered in time, that was the sentence for asking for food. No harm done there. The Chinish continued to stare at me strangely; I decided that I had best look over the viands, take a bite or two here and there, to show a certain noblesse oblige. When I had eaten a small piece of fish they acted decidedly jollier. They strutted back and forth, looking over my men and our accoutrements; they seemed to take a special interest in the elephants. Their chief reached out a hand and prodded one of them gingerly. It drew back and trumpeted, causing all sorts of weapons to be levelled at us. It was time for me to say something else. I read out the next thing on the scroll: "Nika potlatch yaka kopu mika!"

The reaction was sensational. The chieftains turned on me, awe in their eyes. The naked oarsmen fell on their knees and gazed adoringly.

"Goodness!" I said. "Damn brilliant stroke of diplomacy, if I say so myself, eh?"

"You fool!" hissed Aquila. "You just gave away that elephant!"

"Oh."

"You've just given the fellow a present so valuable he can't possibly find anything of equal worth to give in return."

"So?" I said, trying desperately to act as if it were all part of some diplomatic ploy. "Now they'll be eternally in Rome's debt; won't they?"

"If he cannot repay you," said Aquila, "he will kill you. And if he *can* repay you and *you* fail to pay him back impressively enough — you will be shamed in their eyes, and they will doubtless kill you. The outlook is hardly promising. Not to mention the fact that these are *not* the Chinish, as I have been telling you for the past few months, but merely a race of western Terra Novans who —"

"Enough!" This was a little much to take in all at once. Now as I examined the chieftain's face, it was true that his expression was not exactly benign at the moment. It was, in fact, one of unmitigated hatred. In what was obviously a huff, he whirled round and began to confer in a huddle with his colleagues.

Aaye said, "My lord, you were never one for languages. I'm afraid you've put us in quite a pickle by answering his gift of a plate of smoked salmon with something as huge and valuable as an elephant. You have, in effect, utterly ridiculed his largesse. Apparently this *potlatching* in which you have foolishly indulged is an important ritual activity which —"

"Well, I've no intention of insulting their religion," I said, "just of laying my hands on their silk."

The chieftain finished his discussion at that point and barked an order at his slaves. One of them ran back to the canoes.

He returned presently, leading by the hand the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. He motioned her towards me. "*Nika potlatch nika okus-*

tee!" he said angrily.

The girl smiled: dazzling teeth, bright eyes, long dark braided hair, smooth fawn complexion.

"I do believe," said Aquila, "that our chief here has just *potlatched* you his daughter."

"The discus is in your palaestra now," said Aaye.

"Help me, Aquila!" I moaned.

"Well," Aquila said, "I believe it's now your turn to reciprocate, General Titus. Give him something clearly of greater value than a daughter . . . then you'll be ahead of his *potlatching* game."

"I see," I said, although I didn't.

We had resumed our travel along the Ganges (or the Flumen Serpentis, as it was known by everyone except the members of my immediate entourage), the elephants and infantry marching along the river within sight of the vast convoy of gargoyle-prowed canoes. I and Oenothea and my little group had been reluctantly invited to share the canoe of the chieftain, whose barbarous name proved incapable of transcription into any civilized tongue, but appeared to mean something like He-Who-Hooteth-the-Names-of-his-Innumerable-Foes, the hooting referring to the owl, their bird of death. I remarked that the Athenians had a not dissimilar belief, in that an owl hooting in the agora by day was deemed an omen of the direst sort.

"Yes, even among us Lacota a man who gives away all his belongings is accounted a great man, and so a pauper may be the most respected member of a tribe — " said Aquila.

"A strange philosophy indeed," I snorted, "which we Romans have endeavored to rectify wherever possible, teaching you the value of gold and silver and — "

"Compound interest and corporate land-ownership — " Aaye added importantly.

"Be that as it may," said Aquila, "we Lacota have never carried this custom to this excess. Why, it seems to be the whole basis of their culture!" He indicated a nearby canoe, in which two of these Chinish (as I still thought them to be) were engaged in a heated exchange of gifts.

"Good Heavens," I said. "What a peculiar way to manage a civilization! Is it possible, then, that the silks for which our Roman matrons pay so dearly were actually *given* away by the Chinish, and that we could actually have silk for the asking, merely by proffering the right gifts in return?"

"Possible," said Aquila, "but you *will* persist in this silly delusion that this is China, when I tell you quite plainly that — "

"Silence, savage!" I said peremptorily.

"I can hardly wait," Aaye said, "to see their corrals full of silkworms,

and to see their splendid worm-riders as they lasso the worm-herds, taming their refractory spirits to the constant production of their precious sputum. . . .”

“Indeed,” I said, “a magnificent spectacle — ”

We were passing through landscapes lush beyond belief now. Grass green as moss alternated with dense forests. Later we were treated to the sight of a canyon of titanic dimensions, and blazoned in rich hues of umber and maroon, which the *Flumen Serpentis*, surely a god of many talents, had carved from the living mountains; then there were more verdant plains rich with game, which my *sagattarii* hunted when we tired of smoke salmon, the savages’ staple diet. The chieftain must have been, as savages went, a fairly important one; his “insignificant little escort”, as he insisted on calling it, numbered some dozens of canoes, each painted in gaudy hues and manned by some twenty or thirty of naked oarsmen.

Soon, I thought, surely *soon* we will reach the Persian Gulf. Then it will be time to turn the tables; but until then, I had better dissemble, and I had better learn this game of *potlatching* well.

We were just circumambulating (to avoid dashing our boats and ourselves to pieces) an impressive waterfall, which I had decided to name after the Emperor Trajan (the name has not stuck), when I began casting about for a gift of sufficient value to match that of a chieftain’s daughter.

My eye fell upon the Lady Oenothea.

“Dear wife,” I said, “did you not once say to me that you would rather be married to some savage who valued you, rather than to yours truly, who does not?”

“Indeed, but — ” she protested. But then she smiled grimly.

I was feeling better already. The chief’s young daughter, whom I had necessarily bedded in order not to seem unimpressed by the gift, had proved not only companionable, but mercifully silent. I could present her to Trajan later on as a captive Chinish princess, and no doubt she could march in my train during my Triumph as part of my spoils of war, decked with bolts of silk and the bones of silkworms . . . I was awakened from my reverie by the confluence of the river with one even mightier.

“Where are we?” I said, to no one in particular.

“My dear General!” said Aaye with tears in his eyes. “We have undoubtedly reached the great river Indus! We are not far from home at all!”

“Oh? I didn’t know they were connected. I mean, the Indus and the Ganges.”

“Nor did I. But it seems the most scientific deduction I can make at the moment.”

Chief Hooting-Owl grunted and addressed some commands to his paddlers. He had been ignoring us all through this journey, even as he plied us constantly with salmon, salmon roe, salmon pâté, fresh salmon

eyes, salmon oil, and the like. It occurred to me that they must know nothing of the glorious decadence of our Roman banquets. I could not fail to notice, either, that the chief's language, when not addressing us, was quite different from the Chinook which we had been using. A little doubt nagged at me; perhaps Aquila had been right all along, and these were mere savages such as the Lacotii themselves had been? But no; Aquila was surely merely jealous. After all, no one could possibly *like* the idea of a more civilized culture coexisting upon the same continent as one's own, could they? It was thus that I rationalized away Aquila's scornful remarks for the time being.

Perhaps, I thought, I should try a little conversation. . . .

"Um . . . how's the silk this year?"

The question was translated through Aaye, who had to use some tremendous circumlocution to describe silk.

"Silk?" said Hooter in a surly tone. "What silk?"

I concluded that its manufacture must be some sort of religious secret; after all, I, who was a general and a procurator, knew nothing about the workings of motor-cars or bicycles. We travelled on.

"Have you met, O Hooter-of-et-cetera, my good wife, the Lady Oenothea, Princess of Cilicia?" (I shall henceforth omit the complex ritual of translation and its concomitant ballet of elucidatory gesticulations.)

"She is wondrous strange."

"She's yours."

The chief looked at me long and hard, as if trying to ascertain whether or not I had made him the butt of some cruel joke . . . and at long last he laughed aloud. "Thank you, O stranger," he said. "A brilliant move in the game of *potlatch*. But you won't get out of this lightly." He beckoned Oenothea to his side; she went quite willingly, it seemed. "I have a most tremendous *potlatch* planned for our arrival in my home city, such as the Kwakiutl have not seen in a thousand moons of moons. No foreign chieftain with mysterious two-tailed beasts-of-burden is going to beat *me* at the ritual of *potlatch*! Here, *ticky muckamuck*?" He threw me a piece of raw salmon liver.

"Delicious, I'm sure," I said, wondering why he had referred to his people as the Kwakiutl, and not as the Chinish race. I must also mention that all of these people, the beautiful daughter not excluded, stank most abominably of raw fish, and had I not been obliged by the exigencies of diplomacy to deal with them, I would probably have had them long since executed or at least sentenced them to the nearest arena. But I needed the silk as evidence for the emperor Trajan. I tried asking again about the silk, and about the giant silkworm bones I had seen earlier.

"Oh, they're giant lizards," said the chieftain.

I diplomatically swallowed my disbelief. I had heard from Aaye, who frequently quoted the works of P. Josephus Agricola to me, that the

Chinish are an inscrutable race; it was not impossible that this whole production was an elaborate ruse.

"Oh, they are, eh? Jolly good."

"General, the sea!" exclaimed a legionary.

A salt smell assailed our nostrils. We could as yet see very little of the ocean; it peeped out through distant crags. My heart leapt with excitement. The Persian Gulf! Or the Arabian Sea, perhaps . . . at any rate, proof positive that the world was round!

And now we saw dozens of huts lining the river; the canoes were being towed to the bank, and women and children, quite as starkers as our oarsmen had been, began rushing into the waves to greet us. Huge wooden lodges stood out from the houses; and each was guarded by a solemn pillar of wood, sculpted into a pile of those hideous demon faces which had decked the prow of each canoe.

Meanwhile, our elephants had come charging behind us, spraying the mob with their trunks and making a fearful racket, mostly to the delight rather than the terror of the mob, however; from this I gathered that an advance canoe had been sent with news of our impending arrival.

As our chieftain stepped off our canoe, he began to bellow forth an announcement in his own Quaquiutish speech, which was rapidly translated into Chinook for our benefit, and thence into Greek by Aaye. It was to the effect that we were chieftains from a distant land, and had presented him with an elephant and a princess; and that there would shortly be a grand *potlatch* of unprecedented proportions. During the entirety of his speech, Lady Oenothea clung to him, practically devouring him alive. The chieftain did not seem at all bothered by this, however; it seemed to be the way he expected all women to behave.

"This is it," I said. "We shall either return to Rome laden with silks and carrying a treaty (which Trajan can proceed to break at his leisure) or we can end up as spectacle-fodder. It might be the most brilliant diplomatic coup of my life."

"And then again," said Aquila, "it might not."

In the morning my small company and I went out to the seashore and looked out. It was a clear, warm day; gulls cried, and many of the local peasantry were to be seen in their canoes, spearing fish and what have you, by the ruddy dawnlight.

"You know," I said, "considering the evidence *in toto*, somehow I don't think we're in China anymore."

"What nonsense!" Aaye said. "How can you go against every shred of scientific evidence?"

Aquila gave an I-told-you-so sort of shrug.

"So what shall I do?" I said to him. "You always seem to know what to do."

"Well, you'll have to figure out some way of subjugating them; Trajan will perhaps be mollified at the news of a new province."

"Indeed. But what of the dictionary? It worked, didn't it? They *do* speak this Chinish speech here, after a fashion. And the silkworms' bones . . . surely incontrovertible proof — " said Aaye.

"Will you be quiet, you . . . you . . . *Egyptian!*" I said. "Now, the question remains — how shall we put a good face on all this?"

"We could leave," said Aquila, "before we become even deeper embroiled in this *potlatching* business."

"I'm happy to be left here," said Oenothea, who had emerged positively radiant from the marital bed of Hooting-Owl.

"A true Roman wouldn't run away," I said.

"I suppose not," said Aquila, smirking.

"In the meantime, there are all these new places to be named. What, for instance, of this great ocean we have discovered? Trajan would like it named, I'm sure; he thinks that naming things gives one power over them."

"Well, it looks awfully peaceful," Oenothea sighed. "How about the *Oceanus Pacificus*?"

Every one nodded, except me. "It's too much of a cliché. We should name it *after* someone; one of the gods, perhaps, or some emperor."

"How about the *Oceanus Papinianus*?" Aaye said slyly, trying to inveigle himself back into my good graces.

"That sounds . . . that does have a certain ring to it," I said, hardly able to contain myself. "And after all, I *am* the first *civilized* person to set eyes upon it, the first trueborn Roman . . . you fellows being, of course, merely foreigners who have been granted the citizenship."

"The Oceanus Papinianus it is," said Aquila, "you conceited little man."

Ah, perfidious fate! The name did not stick, and instead the new ocean is invariably referred to by the nondescript, absurd name, quite unsuited to its grandeur and magnificence, the Oceanus Pacificus.

"By the *mons veneris* of Isis!" Aaye cried. "Another of those infernal saucers!"

Sure enough, there it was, skimming the sea-surface in the middle distance.

"Curse you!" I shouted at it, more in sadness than anger. "You lead us on to the very edge of the world, taunting us, never answering our questions. If you are gods, you are the most recalcitrant of them all. By what mysteries should we propitiate you? By what rites ensure your good will? What have I done to so incur your wrath, to make me into a veritable Ulysses of the modern age?" It was a passable piece of rhetoric in a style then fashionable in certain Athenian schools of sophistry; and the others applauded me as I finished.



"But perhaps," said Aquila, "they are nothing more than what they have told us; creatures from the distant future in pursuit of a criminal guilty of altering the very fabric of the universe."

"Bah!" said Aaye. "If even Greek and our sage Egyptian philosophers cannot understand the nature of reality, how can you, a savage, presume to expound on this subject with such simplistic remarks, not even bothering to dignify them with the barest modicum of rhetorical figures and classical paradoxes?"

"Will you shut up with your damned onotoloty?" I said, exasperated. "The fact is, the were-jaguars are behind all this, somehow, Jove knows how. And I think we should keep them happy. What about those jade were-jaguar amulets that they gave us in Olmechia? I for one have always worn one ever since then, as a lucky charm."

"And I," said Aaye.

"And . . . even I," said Aquila. "Well, there are times when dancing doesn't quite do the trick, and it's best to be prepared."

Suddenly —

"What was that?" A deep thundering noise boomed from the village.

"The drums! The *potlatch* is beginning!" my comrades shouted all at once. We made haste toward the village of these people, whom we now knew to be the race of Quaquiutii.

As we approached the main lodge of the village, the drums grew ever more deafening. Quaquiutish minstrels chanted and dancers capered. The door was guarded by some twenty of those pillars-of-gruesome-faces, which we had named *totem poles*. As we entered we saw more of the totem poles . . . and at the far end of the lodge, a sight to chill our very marrow.

There was a totem pole, larger than the others, and on it was sculpted several times —

The face of the godlike were-jaguars, riders of the flying saucers, sustainers of the Olmechian super-science!

And then I noticed the other face, with which it alternated.

It was neither bear, nor ape, nor man, but a hairy combination. Its fangs were bared. I could not tell what it was, but I knew instinctively that, unlike the rest of the totem poles with their stylized representation, and like the image of the were-jaguar, which I had seen in the flesh . . . that this monster had been carved from life!

"What is it?" I said.

"It is nothing less," said Aaye, "than an exact reproduction of one of the *homines abominabiles nivis*, or abominable men of snow, said to be found in the Himalayas . . . aha! My theory has been vindicated after all! This is China!"

"Well, we know the were-jaguars really exist," I said. "It strongly suggests that these creatures, too, exist. I think we're in for quite an

adventure."

The chieftain and his people began filing in, decked in all their finery.

"By Jove!" I said. "Imagine all this barbaric splendor as a side show in the arena . . . ."

For the Quaquiutii had covered their naked bodies with woven-sea-shell garments of brilliant hues, and drums pounded, chilling the blood. Hundreds of men and women filled the wooden lodge, chattering and giggling, and beves of children ran chirping without any proper Roman discipline at all. It was this appalling lack of the sense of *order* — for a firm sense of order is inculcated into the minds even of civilizations inferior to our own — that convinced me, in the final analysis, that this was not China at all, but some enclave of hideous savages who might at any moment execute me horribly for some unknowing breach of their inscrutable, barbarous customs.

The music welled up. I stood immutable, every inch the Roman procurator I thought; my new wife, the Egyptian pedant, and the rest of my entourage seemed rather to be enjoying the vulgar rhythms of the savage bards, and rocking to and fro to the music. Presently the barbarians performed a number of dances, most of which seemed to consist of marching ungracefully around in a circle to the accompaniment of deafening poundings and wolf-like howlings. Then followed dances of bacchanalian wildness, performed by dozens of men in wooden masks, decked in feathers and robes of beaten cedar-bark. The dimness of the cavernous lodge was now illumined only by the flickering of wood fires; the flames seemed to lap at the grotesque wooden faces of man and totem pole, to accentuate their crevasses of darkness. And among the dancers too, I noticed, were sculpted masks of the were-jaguar and the abominable snow man; here as with the totem poles, these particular faces seemed to breathe with verisimilitude by contrast with the stylized stiffness of the other gods' visages.

"And now," Chief Hooting-Owl declared, after the seemingly interminable proceedings had become a little less noisy, "I shall present the Bulbous-nosed Chieftain from the East such presents as he has never seen before! Never let it be said I am niggardly in my *potlatches*! Never let it be said that I, greatest and most generous of the Quaquiutii, can give less generously than a mere foreigner!"

I could not suppress a laugh. "Why," I said to my companions, "the man is actually besotted enough to believe that *he* is the civilized one, and *we* are the barbarians!"

"Truly it is enough to awaken any man's compassion," Aquila said, and though the sentiments were natural enough I couldn't help but detect a note of sarcasm in his utterance.

"But . . . *our* gifts!" I went on. "Are they prepared? We've not come unequipped to deal with this savage on his own terms, have we?"



"Heavens, no!" Aaye said. "I intend to make a good showing of the Egyptian art of diplomatic razzle-dazzle."

"It better be good," I said, remembering our debacle with the Olmechii.

The chieftain turned to me. First he lifted off his amazing headdress; it was made of wood and human hair, and chiselled into the shape of a whale — an astonishingly fine work of art to have come from savage hands. With an air of utter disdain, he laid it in front of me. "This royal headdress," he said, "is a thousand years old. It came to me in a grand *potlatch* last year, when we roundly routed the Northern Tlingit by superior show of generosity. Take that, barbarian!" More things were laid at our feet by slaves: delicate sculptures of wood and whale ivory, bark blankets curiously hand-dyed into the shapes of mythological scenes. Young slave girls and boys bound with leather ropes, naked to reveal their physical perfections, their skin sleek with fresh salmon oil. They were quite beautiful, as long as one held one's nose; after I'd cleaned them up a bit they'd fetch me a fortune on the auction block in Rome. I remained impassive, however; I realized that to be impressed was to take a resounding loss in this bizarre, barbaric diplomacy.

I smiled. I no longer made the mistake of essaying the Chinookish tongue; I left it to the scholars in my party. At a gesture from me, centurions tramped into the room with gifts of my own. In order to lend the show an air of mystery, our resident expert on hokum, Aaye, had ordered that the offerings be hidden behind three huge arrases cut from the fabric of one of our tents. We hadn't brought much, so I had perforce to rely on the alienness of our presents and Aaye's brilliant propensity for mendacity. Oh, it galled me to have to rely on an Egyptian's wits; but the Empire must use what resources it can to further its great mission, the civilizing of the world. And better, of course, to have a foreigner be dishonest than to sully the purity of a Roman's tongue. . . .

"In the first place," Aaye said, "we'd like to give you our remaining three elephants. These are magical beasts that render one invincible in war, when properly trained."

The chief snorted. "You have already given me one of the beasts-with-two-tails," he said. "And of the remaining three of yours, one is a mere infant, the other aged, the third suffering from a continual flux of the bowels. Indeed, your generosity overwhelms me!" The assembly of Quaquiutii laughed uproariously; we were obliged to follow suit, but our own laughter sounded pitiful by comparison.

We had on hand, behind the first of the tapestries, one finely worked Persian carpet, which we laid on the ground. Upon it we had placed the most valuable objects from my tent; two flagons of greenish-blue glass, which Aaye had filled with a foul poultice of elephant dung and wine.

"Behold!" Aaye cried impressively, as the cloth was drawn back.

"This is all you can produce? Beware! I am not easily mocked," said the chieftain.

"Lo, the wonders of Roman technology!" Aaye continued, unfazed. "Look at the quality of this glass, this rare substance manufactured from the tears of the gods themselves . . . and within, a potion that renders the most impotent man a towering edifice of passion! That restores full hair growth to the bald! That —"

"Indeed," said the chieftain, rubbing his head thoughtfully. He was not terribly impressed. When he picked up the glass flagon, it shattered, befouling his costly robe.

"Perhaps — you would prefer to peek behind curtain number two?" said Aaye.

"You mock our sacred rituals!" the chieftain said.

"Go through the whole script," I whispered urgently. "At least we can buy time." For we were heavily outnumbered, of course.

"Behind curtain number two —"

"This is foolery!" the chieftain shouted, striding forward to rip down the makeshift canopies. Behind the second were some jars of unguents and a few out-of-date newspapri, which Aaye had planned to pass off as ritual formulas and incantations ("For," he had told me, "our own priests habitually practice such deceptions on the common populace"), and a rusty steam-pipe from a defunct motor-car which one of our Greek soldiers had kept as a souvenir, and which Aaye intended to pass off as a device for detecting fine shifts in the motions of the stars.

Aaye began his explanations, but the chief raged on: "Fools! And to think that I greeted you as messengers from a distant civilization as advanced as our own, when all you offer me are meaningless scribbles on thin sheets, breakable jugs, and an old sludge-pipe! And what's behind curtain number three? More rubbish, I suppose!" He marched toward it and pulled it down. I gulped. For behind it was one of our catapults, and it was intended that, at the signal of the curtain being torn down, it would be set to shower the chieftain with gold. Instead it clouted Hooting-Owl firmly in the jaw and sent him sprawling across the lodge.

A less mighty-thewed man would have been knocked cold, but not this one. He rose up again, furious, shouting for his masked dancers to surround us —

"Hold!" I screamed. "I was but testing you, foolish ones. One gift have I yet!" And I tore my jade were-jaguar from my neck and threw it onto the floor.

The others of my company swiftly did the same.

All the Quaquiutii recoiled in horror.

And then they fell prostrate at our feet.

"That's more like it," I said, feeling better already.

"My lord . . ." the chieftain cringed visibly at my baleful glare. "We

will give you everything! Our homes! Our village! Our lands! Our salmon! Only have mercy!"

"I'm sure Caesar, your White and Greatest Father, can be prevailed on to show compassion," I said at length. "Very well, we accept your offer of eternal servitude."

When this was duly translated, a change came over the chieftain, and he began openly to weep. "What is the matter?" I said, trying to show the proper admixture of severity and mercy, yet inwardly gloating over our victory and reflecting on the fact that the flying saucer-creatures had saved our lives yet a third time.

"Alas, our lands are not ours to give you, O Bulbous-nosed Chieftain," Hooting-Owl sobbed. "We are thralls to a terrible and evil power. But you . . . wear the symbol of the little green masters . . . surely you can aid us."

"What power?" I said. "Tell us. Caesar is omnipotent! I myself shall lead an expeditionary force against whoever dares molest you." I was in my element now, acting the role of the great general.

"You will truly save us from our overlords, our oppressors?" said Hooting-Owl.

"My word as Caesar's mouthpiece on it!"

Slowly a smile formed on the savage chieftain's face. I did not like the smile. The crowd parted; looking straight ahead, I saw the largest of the totem poles, in its place of honor, lit by the flickering firelight. I saw the master whom they feared most.

The face of *homo abominabilis nivis*.

"Sasquatch," the chieftain murmured.

"You expect me to go against . . . *that*?" I shuddered at the fierce features, animated by the flames, at the huge hollow eyes, the glistening fangs so chillingly rendered in whalebone.

"You *have* given your word, haven't you? As the mouthpiece of the High One."

Slowly it dawned on me.

"By Jupiter!" I stammered. "I've been tricked!"

I stared from Aquila to Aaye, back and forth, unable to believe that I had bungled so badly as to get myself conned into going against some possibly supernatural foe. For if I didn't, the honor of Rome itself would suffer. I would almost certainly end up as an unwilling celebrant in one of Trajan's miserly spectacles. And this time I wouldn't be laughing about Trajan's tawdry taste, either.

"I should never have attempted this ludicrous alien diplomacy!" I shouted.

My two old comrades nodded sagely, for once agreeing with me completely. I knew who had won the game of *potlatch* that day. I'd never had a chance.

Chief Hooting-Owl started to screech with laughter, a hideous racket. So that's how he'd come by that name!

We stared at the image of the abominable snowman for a long time, awed, hushed. At last the silence was interrupted by the voice of old Aaye. "I knew it!" he was saying. "These barbarians could never have been the mighty Chinish civilization. It is *this* that is the final link in the puzzle! Legends of abominable snowmen in the mountains beyond India. And now these *Sasquatii*. A race of giants, masters of super-science! It all makes sense now! Gentlemen . . . we have the honor of being the first civilized creatures to gaze knowingly on the likeness of . . . a Chinaman!"

Thus it was that I found myself, Aaye, and Aquila, stalking off into the lush thick pine forests of the land that was not China, at the head of a decidedly ragtag band of centurions. The ground was disagreeably wet; ferns snagged continually at our caligae. We had no idea what we were up against — man, magic or divinity. All we knew was that our feet were muddy, our noses stuffy from the constant damp, and that our resident expert had a pet theory to which I was forced to listen at length. One consolation was that we had been permitted to retain our Olmechian jade were-jaguars; it was possible that these talismans might save our souls again, after all, unlikely as it seemed.

Our path was clear enough. Every now and then a little abominable-snowman-shaped totem pole peered from the ferns. Following these signposts, we trudged ever deeper into the forest.

Needless to say, I was not pleased at this turn of events. Far from cleverly fooling some simpleminded peasants, we had actually been hoodwinked by them into seeking out and attacking a possibly supernatural creature! "And they can't lose!" I moaned. "If we are killed, the better for them; if we dispatch the *Sasquatii*, we vanquish their oppressors for them! These *Quaquiutii* are *masters* of this potlatching."

Yes. Over a banquet of whole smoked salmon, mountains of salmon roe on dishes of curiously carved whalebone drenched with salmon oil, which impressed us Romans by its quantity if not its variety, Hooting-Owl had told us the whole story. For generations, the *Sasquatii* had settled in the area, exacting a tribute of salmon and slaves. Occasionally a were-jaguar would be seen too, but no one knew what their place was in the scheme of things, and so it was thought wisest to propitiate both. And the flying saucers? There had been more than usual in the past few days, but they were not considered particularly unusual.

"How many days have we been travelling?" I said.

"About five hours, General," said Aquila.

"Let's eat."

"We only have a few days' supply, General, and it's all dried salmon."

We trudged onward.

Presently we came to a clearing in the forest, where there was a sort of circle of the miniature totem poles.

"This must be the place Hooting-Owl told us of," said Aquila, "where they leave their offerings to the abominable snowmen, and run quickly away before they're caught."

"Look!" cried Aaye. "Monstrous footprints!" He had tripped and half-fallen into one.

"You know," Aaye was saying, as he scrambled his way out, "it would be nice to give the creature some proper name, rather than this barbarous *sasquatus*. It doesn't sit well on the tongue. How about *megapus*? Look at the size of that footprint. *Megapus*. Yes. *Bigfoot*. A good Greek word. Has a certain majesty to it. I think that the scientists back at the academy will be very pleased —"

"In the name of Jupiter Vacantancae!" I said. "What does it matter what it's called, when it's going to kill us any moment?"

"What now?" I said.

"Wait," said Aquila. "Build a campfire. Smoke!"

"But — they could be hiding behind these very trees!"

"We do not know that. Best to make our minds still. It is a good day to die, eh, what?"

"It's never a good day to die," I grumbled.

"Come, young Titus!" Aquila said. "When I first met you, you were ready to commit suicide at a moment's notice. Be of good cheer. Listen, I'll sing you a song! *Eya-ha-ha—*"

"Lovely, Aquila, but —"

Just then, we heard a deafening roar. And a ponderous, pounding footfall. And a hideous, earsplitting laughter that seemed to rock the very forest. "Good heavens!" I cried. "The *Sasquatus* is approaching already!"

They were all around us, suddenly, a couple of dozen of the creatures, well over five cubits tall, their toothy jaws slavering, waving their arms wildly.

"What are we to do?" I screeched. "Quick, form a phalanx!" We huddled together. One of the megapuses lumbered forward and shoved some centurions aside, guffawing horribly.

"Pila! Scuta!" I shouted. But our weapons had been knocked out of our hands. There was only one thing left to do. I yanked my were-jaguar talisman off my neck, and bade the others do the same. Then we advanced, holding them up like the insignia of exorcists.

"Begone," Aaye was intoning, "in the name of the sacred Olmechian were-jaguar —"

It was a ludicrous spectacle, and should not have stopped them for a moment. But to our surprise they halted and looked at us long and hard; and then they ceased their attack. The tallest of them, his fur a mottled



brown and yellow-white, ambled forward and saluted us.

"Shalom," he said distinctly, and then muttered some words which were in a tongue I half-recognized —

"Good heavens!" Aaye said. "The Judaeen speech! These Sasquatii are Jews!"

The head megapus bowed gravely to us and said (his speech was translated for us by Aaye, who had, in his boyhood in Alexandria, known many speakers of Aramaic, and had also a nodding acquaintance with the Hebrew tongue), "Greetings, O children of the little green masters! Forgive us our peculiar and unprepossessing appearance, which is, alas, not our doing; all will be explained to you shortly. My name is Abraham bar-David, and I am the patriarch of this merry band here."

"But — but — " I said.

"Not a word more! You shall be our honored guests. I shall be most happy to lead you to our humble city, and to introduce you to the little green masters themselves. They are, I am sure, dying to meet you."

With that he turned around, gestured expansively with his furry arm, and led us further onward into the forest.

Well, death had been staved off for an hour or two at least. We followed the tall sasquatii deeper and deeper into the woods; presently the rough path broadened into a paved road with a gleaming surface. The trees thinned, and suddenly, gasping, I could see what lay behind them, in the vale beneath.

"A vast and splendid city!" I cried, as we saw strange metal columns and curious spires, and flying saucers soaring back and forth among them.

"At last," Aaye said smugly. "We have been vindicated. There is indeed a splendid civilization here. The sasquatii and Chinish folk . . . are one!"

"You are terminally stupid, Egyptian," said Aquila. "You should stop bending the facts to your theories, and accept truths as they come."

For once I had to applaud the old Lacotian chieftain. Barbarian he might have been, but the Emperor *had* made him a senator, and when you were used to his funny ways, he wasn't a bad sort.

The road wound downward toward the city, a splendid agglomeration of metal spires and curiously shaped columns. There stood expansive platforms perched on gilded towers, where fleets of the flying saucer things waited, ready to swarm skyward at a second's notice. What an outlandish city it was! The buildings were in pure geometrical shapes of the kind I had learnt about from my tutor, as a young boy struggling with Euclid: they were icosahedrons, octahedrons, domes, and glittering spheres that swam of their own accord in the very air, emitting an otherworldly music.

"The sounds are positively Pythagorean in their primal purity!" Aaye babbled happily.

There were little green men everywhere. Some resembled the were-jaguars of our previous acquaintance; others looked like nothing so much as those mannikins of dough that old women love to bake. Others still were like enormous lobsters or fibrillating octopodes.

As some of the more monstrous miscreants approached, our Greeks and Romans made signs to ward off the evil eye; our Lacotian centurions, however, seemed to accept it all with equanimity, and the sasquatii, human though they claimed themselves to be, were utterly unmoved by the sight of these prodigies.

"What city is this?" I asked of our host, the self-proclaimed Jewish patriarch.

"It is a city," he said impressively, "neither here nor there; neither within your time nor out of it; it is the Time Citadel of the Dimensional Patrol Corps."

"Foolish man!" said Aaye scornfully. "Still trying to hide the fact that we have stumbled at last upon China itself." At which the sasquatii burst into raucous and abundant laughter.

"At least," I said, "if this is truly the land of our old friends the were-jaguars, we should be safe here. They have never meant us any harm, which is more than can be said for, say, Caesar himself."

"True, O procurator," said Aaye, as we ascended by elevating device up one of the saucer parapets, "but it would be nice to know what this all means; and if our friends here are indeed Judaeans, what god has metamorphosed them into such terrifying shapes."

"Oh, I expect the little green master'll want to tell you himself," said Abraham bar-David. "It's a long story."

We entered now — this is the truth, I swear it upon the maidenhead of Artemis — into a transparent bubble-like vehicle, which carried us through the air into the heart of one of the golden flying spheres. Soon we had stepped out into a chamber of dimensions huger even than the Flavian Amphitheater or Colosseum of Rome itself; and there, before our very eyes, enthroned in splendor, stood —

"Jupiter help us!" I said. "It's V'Denni-Kenni himself; I'd know him anywhere!" Actually I wasn't a bit sure; but as we neared the seat of power I became convinced that this was truly the very were-jaguar whose flying saucer had plucked us off the sacrificial altar so long ago, that day of the solar eclipse in the land of the Olmechii. I could hardly contain my joy. "Do I dare to hope? Ah, V'Denni-Kenni, our old friend — may I call you friend, O sublime one? — once more you have appeared at the moment of our direst need!" In my enthusiasm I no longer spoke any of the barbarous languages I had half-mastered. I broke out into the Emperor's Latin, and jolly proud of it, too. I knew that the walls would be

implanted with translating devices, and that they would shortly reverberate with the Green One's reply.

And reply there was.

"Those infernal Romans again! For god's sake, K'Tooni-Mooni, can't you *ever* steer a straight course through the transdimensional disjunctive nodes? Sometimes I despair of you!" One of the giant lobsters emerged, then a large green octopus; they began conversing in their language, ignoring us completely.

It was Aquila who finally got through to them.

"Now look here," he said. "You may be gods or men of the future; I care not. For all I know, I may be at this moment relaxing in the comfort of a sweat-lodge back in Lacotia, smoking dreamweed, and am here only as a wraith, a traveller on a spirit journey. You may all be phantasms. But my aching bones certainly don't think so. I'm an old man and a chief of the Lacotii, so perhaps you might begin by telling me if I'm still in this world or not. And after, I think the general has a story to tell."

"We apologize," said V'Denni-Kenni. "You *are*, in a manner of speaking, in this world. And as for your tale — proceed."

And so it was that I blurted out the entire story of our mission. Of Trajan's parsimoniousness. Of the Lady Oenothea's unpleasant embraces and the subsequent charms of Hooting-Owl's daughter. Of the attack of Sianii. Of *potlatchings* and the skeletons of silkworms.

"And all I want now," I said, "is for you to send us back. I don't know what vast conflict you may be involved in, whether there's war in heaven as there was during the time of the Trojan War — but I don't want any part of it! I don't see why you should send your flying saucers after us, following us up and down the River Miserabilis, bobbing up at every crisis, and not even telling us what's happening or where we're supposed to be going —"

I was weeping now, in full view of my men. It was a shameful, disgusting sight, but I was beyond caring about the old Roman virtues and dignities. I didn't want any part of anything at all.

"Blasphemy!" Aaye was saying to me. "You make demands of the very gods?" And Abraham, who only believed, of course, in that rather nebulous, invisible Judaeic god, looked a little sheepish.

The green lobster, were-jaguar and octopus conferred among themselves for a few short moments.

"O men of the distant past," said V'Denni-Kenni at last. "You saw flying saucers all along the way here?"

"Yes," I said.

"You have details of all the sightings? Dates, directions, numbers of saucers spotted?"

"I think Aquila and Aaye can supply you with them." And the three green creatures listened as the old sages told all they could remember

about our sightings.

The were-jaguar nodded gravely. "It is just as I thought! Ah, I deplore the directive that prevents us from manifesting ourselves all through the continua we must police! Otherwise *we* could have spotted the Criminal long before this. The final confrontation is about to happen! The moment of ultimate truth! Yes, some of your sightings we can account for, you know, regular traffic between Olmechia and here, but others . . . yes . . . it is clear! The Time Criminal is near, and analysis of your data indicates that he was moved westward . . . towards the island at the nexus of the universes! We must ready ourselves for the coming battle." And he made as if to leave the room.

"Wait! What about *us*?" I said.

They stopped for a moment and looked us over.

"Oh, you tiresome Romans again," said the lobster. "Well, you've helped us, and I suppose we owe you some sort of explanation . . . an oath of secrecy, though, first."

Aquila laughed. "You think anyone would believe us even if we told?"

"I suppose not," said the octopus. "Well, here we go . . ."

Thus it was the V'Denni-Kenni told us the following incredible tale. . . .

"There are," he began, "billions upon billions of universes; they lie side by side within a transdimensional continuum, and each is but a hair's-breadth different from its neighbor. You might think that billions and billions would be enough for anyone; but there are always others who want more. And thus it was that the Time Criminal came to be.

"No one knows his identity. But we, the dimensional patrol, have detected his presence through a series of paradoxes that threaten the very fabric of the universe. For some years ago (in our own time, unimaginable to you) it was noticed, during routine policing of the time-lines, that neighboring universes were no longer just *slightly* askew from each other. Someone had been travelling through the time-lines, changing here and changing there, wreaking havoc with the flow of causality, you see. It's as if we had caught a child throwing stones into the ripple-less Lake of Being. I hope this isn't too heavy for you?"

It was, but we, stunned by the offhand way in which the godlike were-jaguar spoke of the fate of universes, were actually speechless.

V'Denni-Kenni continued.

"The Time Criminal invaded your universe, you see, centuries ago. He found himself in what is now Judaea; and he abducted hundreds of Hebrew tribesmen from the desert for his genetic experiments, creating chimaeras and monstrosities and finally . . . the abominable snowman himself! Yes, your sasquatus is a member of the lost tribes of Israel. Becoming bored of these pursuits, the Master of Chaos jumped around in your continuum, causing you Romans to discover steamships a thousand

years earlier than in our history books. The abominable snowmen he deposited all through dozens of the known worlds, as evidence of his having come and gone . . . they have been here, in the land of the Quaquiutii and Tlingit, for a century now, gentle tyrants who demand nothing more than an annual tribute of salmon."

"Indeed," said Abraham bar-David, "we stayed here so long only because we have an irresistible appetite for this smoked salmon, which we devour constantly with a kind of round, holed breadloaf smeared with creamed cheese."

"Why," said the were-jaguar, ignoring this, "does the Time Criminal leave these sasquattii scattered throughout the universe? Assuredly as clues for us . . . for the man wants war, you see. He wants to bring about the Final Spectacle, a battle of the universes whose magnitude you puny creatures of the past cannot possibly imagine. Even if it means the destruction of a million universes. He is a madman, a megalomaniac such as we thought had been eliminated centuries before our time."

"Your evidence . . . insignificant as it may seem to you . . . has been a great help to us in tracking down our enemies. I wish there was some way to reward you —"

"There is, divine ones," I said, prostrating myself in my awe at his mystic, incomprehensible words. "We are far from home, and perhaps if your augustnesses would care to drop us off a little nearer home, as you were kind enough to do last time —"

"That is, alas, impossible!" said V'Denni-Kenni. "All our dimensional patrol vehicles will be needed now for the coming fray. Unfortunately, in the grand scheme of things, you see, a few humans from the distant past, from an anomalous universe that should not even have existed in the first place . . . have little significance. I wish I could help you . . . but you are dream-figments, you folks; and the man who dreamed you up is on the loose, and very dangerous indeed. We must go to him."

"Well!" I said. "I like that. Here we are, we've trudged goodness knows how many *mille passus*, we've told you everything we know to help you on your quest for something we can't even understand — and you have the temerity to tell us that we're just figments of some evil god's imagination!"

"Surely," said Aaye, "a sophist's argument only, and not intended to have any connection with reality."

"Be still, little one," said the lobster. "We will help you in any way we can, given the haste with which we must now uproot the time citadel and vanish in pursuit of the Evil One."

"Well," said Aquila, "we do have a more pressing problem than returning home."

"Yes," I said. "We must return and face the Quaquiutii. We can't claim to have subjugated their oppressors, so we'll lose this *potlatching*

competition and they might even kill us."

Abraham the megapus laughed. "Is *that* all you need! I think I can probably help you here . . . how would you like to take me back to Rome with you?"

I turned to see the sasquatius beaming jovially, his fangs glistening in the light from the gold-covered walls of the vast rotunda. One could hardly say no to such a creature.

"I'd be proud, most proud," I said.

"Ah! It will be wonderful, too, to return to Israel, of which I have heard only in old songs and legends. Tell me, is the Temple in Jerusalem built yet?"

"Actually, the Emperor Titus burned it down thirty years ago," I said.

"Ah. Well, I do seem to be a little out of date. Well, are we ready to go back and scare the living daylight out of your Quaquiutii?"

"I suppose so."

And so saying, he led us out of the huge hall. The creatures of the future had long ceased to notice us; and no one stopped us as we wandered out of that strange city.

One spectacle yet remained, however, and it was the most impressive of all.

As we strode up the hill road that led back into the forest of pines, we heard a low rumbling . . . our very bones quaked. "What is it?" I said in alarm, remembering tales of the eruption in Pompeii.

"Oh, it's nothing," said Abraham. "Just the city taking off, that's all."

I turned around to look, as the roaring began, pounding my ears. Nothing I'd ever heard before had been so loud — not the screamings of ten thousand Parthians as their army advanced upon us! And then I saw whence the deafening din came: it was the Time Citadel.

It was glowing now, the tops of the towers blindingly incandescent; and the flying saucers were hovering like hummingbirds over the parapets. The city was shaking now. An involuntary shriek escaped our collective throats as the whole megalopolis tore loose from the ground and shot skyward like brimstone from a catapult. Flames enveloped the field. In a few seconds the city had become as a comet, so bright as to dim the very summer sun; and its only remnant was a charred and blasted plain that spewed forth little fountains of fire.

"What a spectacle!" I said. "Imagine reproducing *that* in the arena . . ."

"Oh, you Romans! No time for that now!" Aquila said. "Hurry up — we've got to deal with Hooting-Owl!"

It was a simple matter to descend by storm into the Quaquiutish village, with some dozens of sasquatii (or *megapodes*, to use the proper Greek appellation) at our head; the natives ran screaming from their houses as we took possession of the wooden lodge where but a day before

we had been made to look like blithering idiots. After about ten minutes of lumbering and shambling, we reduced the Quaquiutish chieftains to gibbering helplessness, and they prostrated themselves before us, pleading for mercy. In the meantime, in an attempt to propitiate these furry gods, the village dancers had masked themselves and were working themselves into a frenzy of leaping and caterwauling.

"Well, well, Hooting-Owl, old chap! Quite a reversal, isn't it?"

"Have mercy! Have mercy!"

"Very well. I shall be compassionate. I claim this entire village and its environs in the name of his August Majesty, the Emperor Marcus Ulpius Trajanus, White and Greatest Father of All Terra Nova! You, Hooting-Owl, I will set up as regent in the Emperor's name; for it is not our way to annihilate the local customs of underling nations, but to preserve the good and gradually introduce the better. And I command that you never again have the hubris to play *potlatch* against *me*, who am, after all, the Mouthpiece of Caesar Himself — "

"Your Omnipotence is . . . more generous than I deserve. . . ."

Hooting-Owl prostrated himself firmly in the mud as Aquila, Abraham and Aaye came up behind me. "Well, it's all settled then."

"Except for one thing," Aquila said. "What about — China?" And he began to laugh.

"Oh, there's no such place," I said. "Trajan will just have to be told, firmly and finally, that no such land exists. Not *here*, at least." I shuddered, thinking about ending up as arena-fodder. "I suppose I must now resign myself to some painful death. Perhaps I should stay here, go native, wear a breechclout and feathers — "

"No need for that, General Titus!" Aquila said. "Have you forgotten, dear General, that you have carved out two whole new provinces for Caesar? East of here lies Siannia, with its capital city of Urbs Celeritatis . . . and here Quaquiutia, at the shores of this Oceanus Papinianus, a land rich in salmon. You have singlehandedly *doubled* Rome's might in the new world!"

"But . . . but this Urbs Celeritatis is just a fort with a couple of wooden lodges!" I said. "And Quaquiutia's capital city is just — " I waved my arms about the village, where natives still cowered behind totem poles and sasquattii still ambled about, their arms swinging.

"Ha! Not by the time *I'm* through with it!" said Aaye. "I am, as you know, an Egyptian, and by my very nature a master of the dark and mysterious. I'll paint a word-picture of the frights we've faced, of the hordes of savages we've overcome . . . let them say, O procurator, that you came, you saw, you conquered!"

"Well . . . " I said. "I've seen ample proof of your verbal skills before, but — "

"Oh, he'll do it, General," said Aquila. "It is, after all, his hide we're

talking about.”

I was beginning to feel better already. We would winter here, in this village of now properly subservient savages; we would have ample time to prepare a whale of a story for the August Caesar. In our wild-geese-chase after a legend, a dream, we had come up with some very real Roman provinces: well, almost. By the time Trajan heard about things in Rome, I'd have long dispatched troops to mop up my operation.

For a moment a thought nagged me: what was it the were-jaguars had referred to? *The final spectacle*. Oh, to see such a thing! The fate of a million universes! I felt a little sliver of curiosity insinuating itself into my little noggin.

*The final spectacle!*

But I dismissed the thought from my head. Right now I was Papinian the Conqueror who had stormed through the Montes Saxosi in a blaze of glory, and carved great provinces out of this untamed continent. I practiced a languorous wave of the hand; the Quaquitutii quickly scuttled about, fearful of my every gesture. I permitted myself a gracious smile.

“And now,” I said majestically, “I think I’m ready for a piece of smoked salmon liberally covered with creamed cheese and served upon an annular loaf!”

“Yes, your Lordship, at once!” the Quaquiutish chieftain crooned, as the *sasquatii* began to lick their chops menacingly.

“That’s the spirit, my good man,” I said.



## Notes to satisfy purists

1. The Chinook language was a trade language used in many parts of the Pacific Northwest. I think it’s still in use, but all the modern dictionaries of it I’ve looked at contain whole slews of words borrowed from English and French, while the historical notes maintain that it existed far earlier than contact with the Western culture. I have carefully avoided such incongruous words here. Later, under the Romans, the words that would have been, in *our* timeline, borrowed from English will no doubt appear as Latin borrowings.

2. I have telescoped, for the sake of economy, what should have been more than one *poilatch* into a single one; perhaps the customs were different in A.D. 90 anyway.

3. The hieroglyphics used are those normally used by Egyptian scribes when transcribing Greek names, i.e. those found in the cartouches of Ptolemy, Cleopatra, etc.



Dear Ms. Mavor,

In your June 1982 issue, Robert Silverberg expressed the "Opinion" that people who sell books, but refuse to stock whips & chains pornography, are on a par with the self-styled moral majoritarians who want to legislate morality for all of us. Well, pardon me Bob, but it seems to me that the Silverberg imperative is much closer to the Falwell brand.

Would he insist that the proprietors of a vegetarian food store install meat products? Would he insist that fundamentalist parents teach their children evolution at home? Would he insist that textbook publishers put out a line of fantasy stories? Then why castigate booksellers who do not stock books which violate *their* principles? It's their ethics & morals they have to live with, and he should rethink his attitudes before he writes another diatribe like that.

As to the "unforgivable production botches" for which you apologised to George R.R. Martin, I suppose you have already been informed of the repeat performance on pages 24 to 27 of the June ish. Over half of page 24 should be on 26 & 27.

Clifton Ambury,  
768 Amador St.  
Richmond CA 94805

*We apologise again for the production botches, and assure you that this sort of thing shouldn't happen again. Nowadays, a piece goes by two proofreaders, and the author before actually being printed.*

*Somebody has to catch it!*

— Editor

Dear Sir;

I read "Opinion" (June) with interest and agreed with most of what you wrote.

But — shouldn't one draw the line somewhere? With magazines and publishing houses in big trouble — see recent *Writer's Digest* articles — and with books and magazines costing so much, it's disgusting to spend more than I can afford at times, for a badly written collection of words that years ago would be scribbled on school-house walls by furtively nasty little boys. Not put in print for the delectation of tasteless indiscriminating types looking for cheap thrills under the guise of SF. I wish I could meet with your "sensitive, intelligent," booksellers to congratulate them. Could it be these qualities are the reason why they refuse to sell junk?

"Intercom" had a very pertinacious letter from Bill Daugherty who said it better than I from a reader's viewpoint. There must be writers around capable of putting together a good entertaining story that isn't offensive. Why not use them? I once bought every issue of several SF and fantasy magazines, but now I seldom pick up more than one or two a year. Also a form of censorship, Mr. Silverberg!

Very sincerely,  
Maxine Tarr Burpee  
Auburn ME

*We agree that an entertaining story doesn't have to be offensive. Of course, standards of offensiveness are variable, but we think it is quite possible to avoid gratuitous sex and violence. And surely any writer with a decent vocabulary can write his way around four or five certain very short words. We hope you'll find Amazing more entertaining than offensive in the future! — Editor*

Dear Mr. Scithers.

I was pleased to see that you and Darrell Schweitzer have taken on the challenge of reviving *Amazing*. I admired your work at *LA'sfm* and hope you are as big a success with *Amazing*.

By the way, is there any truth to the rumor that TSR may bring back *Fantastic*?

Yours,  
Jim Lee  
Windber PA

*I wouldn't say we are reviving Amazing, since the Mavor issues weren't dead. More precisely, we are bolstering the magazine and raising it to new heights. As for Fantastic, yes, we would like to resume separate publication, perhaps late in 1983. But nothing is definite yet. We have to work on Amazing first.*

*We have increased the size of the type, to 10 points on 11 for stories, and 9 points on 10 for reviews, features, and departments. And we have added 32 more pages to each issue. We hope you'll like these changes, and the others that are to come. (A point, by the way, is a measure of how large type is. There are 72 points to an inch. So much for metrication!) — Editor*

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Congratulations on assuming the

editorship of *Amazing* magazine. It has been very interesting to me, but very difficult to find.

At a local convention, Steve and Kathleen Goldin and Larry Niven discussed it. They seemed to think that you, if anyone could bring the magazine to the national prominence that it deserves. It sounds like exciting challenge.

I hope that your policy will continue to include sending beginning writers the handy tips and printouts that you used at *Asimov's*. They have been very useful and I have handed them out to friends who show an interest in such things.

Thank you for the time you have spent on my submissions to *Asimov's* magazine. I hope that I have learned something from it.

Yours truly,  
Janet M. Alvarez  
Santa Cruz CA

*We found we have so much to say that we wrote a whole book on the subject: On Writing Science Fiction (The Editors Strike Back!). Then we distilled that down to a 32-page booklet which you may obtain by sending a check or money order for one dollar to Amazing SF Stories, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147-0110. (The dollar barely covers our direct mailing and handling costs; we'll waive it in case of real need.) We hope these help!*

*We invite letters! Let us know what you think of the magazine. What do you want to see? What should we avoid?*

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*Science fiction fandom began in the letter columns of Amazing, over fifty years ago. Remember your Roots. Write! — Editor*

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